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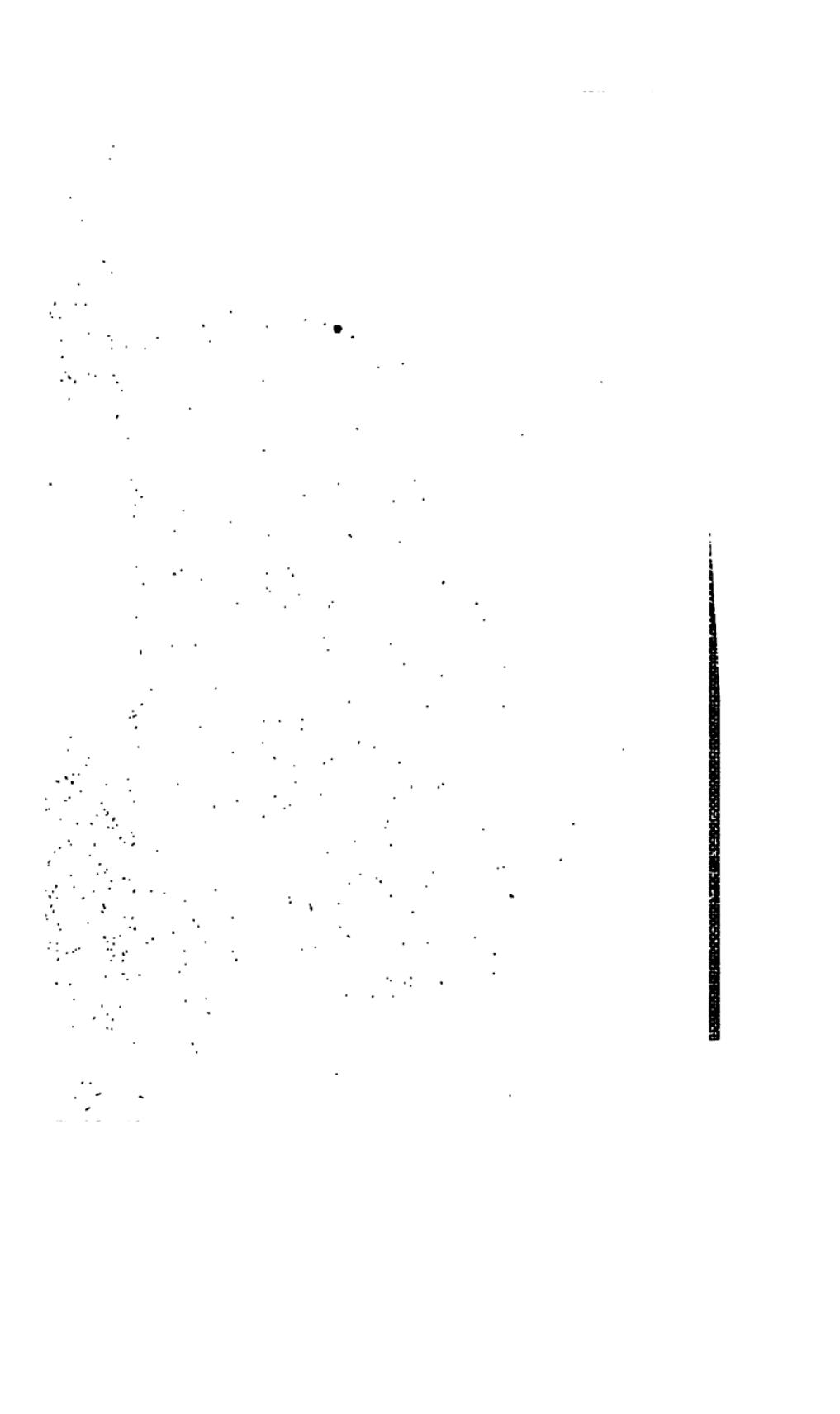
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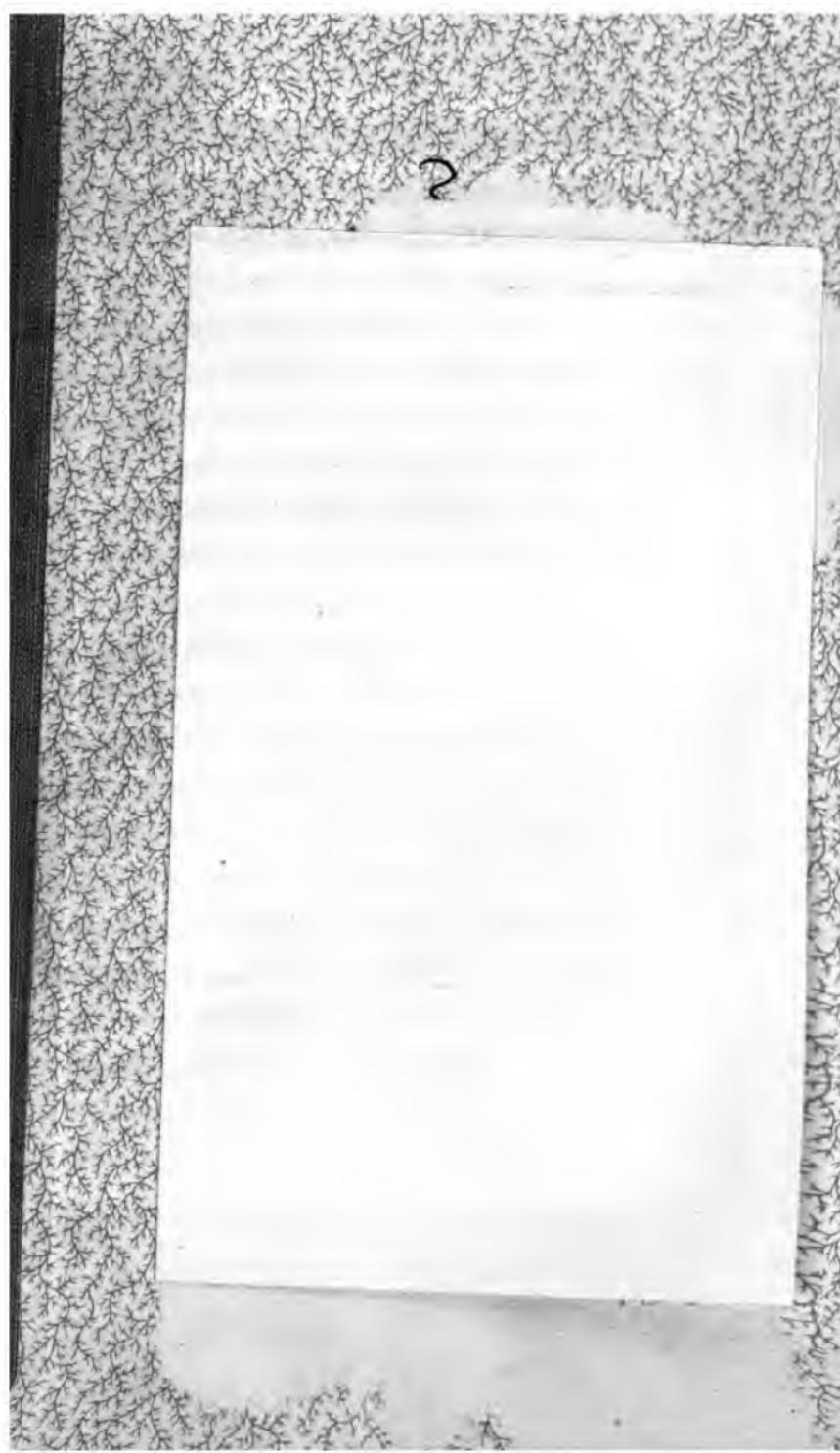
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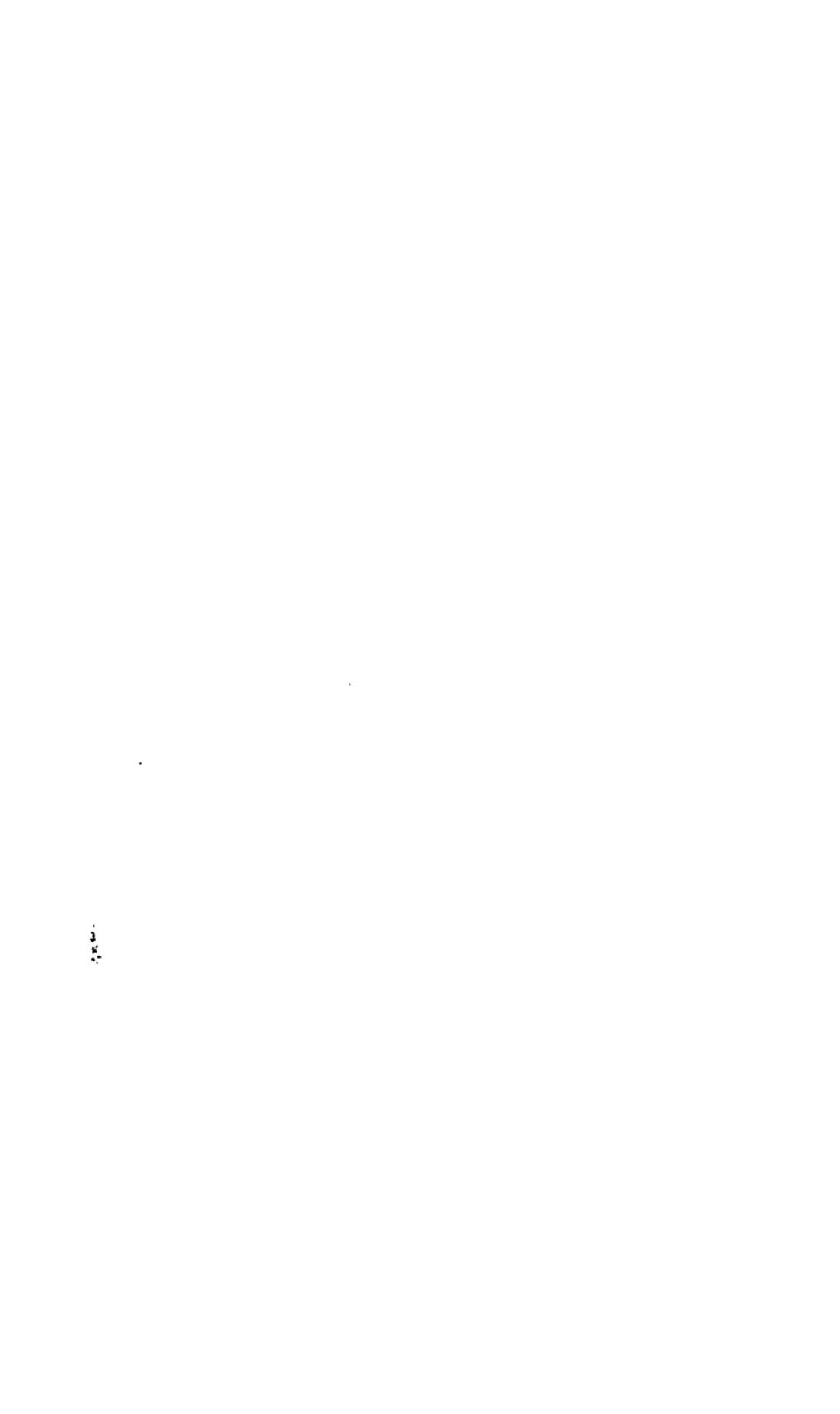
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BREAD AND WINE

A Story of Graubünden

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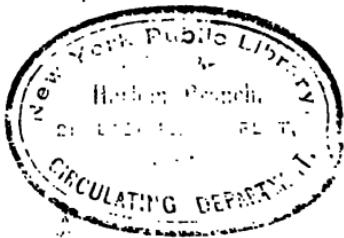
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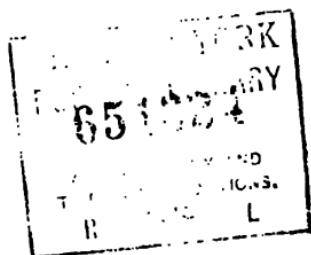


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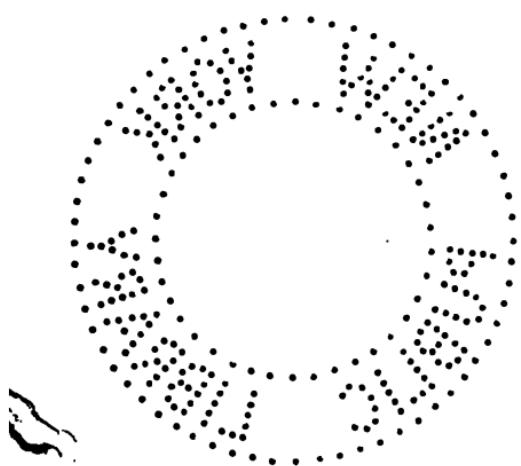
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TO MY HUSBAND

Pfister. Nov. '10



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INTRODUCTION

IF in the present day Davos is living two lives, that of the native and that of the stranger, its life in the past was different from either. When the invalids and the holiday makers go away in the spring, the hotels and balconied villas draw down their blinds, and in the consequent leisure and silence the few old houses they have shouldered out of sight and memory emerge in all their historic significance. Then one remembers that among the ancestors of these who to-day keep hotels and farms in Graubünden, or who trade in foreign cities until such time as they may bring their prosperity back to their beloved valley, there were men who descended from their Spartan mountain commonwealth in embassage to Venice, France, and Austria; who re-

ceived in their simple Rathhaus the envoys from these and other courts ; who, as rulers of the Val Teglina, were valued and feared by the several neighboring nations ; who retained their simplicity and patriotism while they accepted ennoblement from foreign kings and played parts in the great councils and wars of Europe. When landmarks are shifted and maps remade, the land-folk must suffer some change as well, and so from the date of the absorption of Graubünden into the Helvetic Republic, the nobles have borne no titles. But among the innkeepers, shopmen, and peasants of Graubünden to-day, you may often find men whose names savor of baronies, coats-of-arms, and heroic tradition, — men who bear themselves for the most part, be it said, with an independence and integrity not unworthy these ancestral dignities.

Whether of noble or simple birth, the Graubündeners are a fine people, — religious, earnest, industrious, hospitable ; not

very humorous ; not lightly moved to anger, but being moved, hard to dissuade from the black and sullen sense of injury ; of a most hardy health and courage, and thrifty as Lowland Scots. Although they are not rich in the picturesque superstitions and poetic folk-lore of Latin and Celtic races, they carry under their quiet bearing an uplifting passion for their mountains, and the gifts of true love and strong hate ; and as all intensity of feeling quickly outruns prose, so these strong, homely people, who sing few ballads and reck little of witches and the other fairy folk, are sometimes moved to action as wholly poetic, devoted, or tragical, as any of the immortal lovers of history.

Here, then, or wherever else may still be found peasants of as fine a temper as these, let the story-teller — now so faithfully describing the city-bred men and women who devote the leisure they have not earned to the cultivation of the nerves and passions

INTRODUCTION

they cannot control — come and find stories that shall be worth the telling and hearing ; for here surely are all the elements he needs. Here, as in Paris, Petersburg, or London, people are born, people are buried ; they rejoice, sorrow, and love. But with this difference, — and it is one both story-teller and reader will profit by : birth, that misfortune and accident of city fashion, is here welcomed as the best of gifts ; death, in a region where bread-winning still holds men in homely intimacy with danger, is necessarily often heroic ; pleasure, if primitive, is the sweeter for being earned, sorrow the better borne for a simple faith in God. And the passion of love — that joyful mystery of spirit and blood all the world over ! — is here neither a mania nor a disease, but tempered by toil is the very health of life and the mother of all the virtues.

BREAD AND WINE

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN LOSES ONE LOVE AND GAINS A BETTER

WHEN Christian Valär passed his twenty-fourth birthday, he agreed with his mother that it was time to take a wife, and that he was quite rich enough to make her comfortable. He owned not only two cows and a promising heifer, and, as burgher of Frauenkirch, his birthplace, the right to pasture them in the Sertig Valley and to cut his firing in the Sertig forest, but a stout horse as well, Simon Peter by name, who drew his cart in summer and sledge in winter. He had too a good name for sobriety and kindness among his neighbors, and was popular with the foreign visitors who hired him and Simon Peter to take them about the mountain roads.

Loving his mother more than any one else, and finding her wiser too, he faithfully believed her when she told him that if a man would be blessed in his marriage, he must choose a healthy, clean, good-tempered girl, a good dairywoman and a regular church-goer, and he went about shyly but shrewdly measuring the young women of the valley (for like most of his kind he had no thought of marrying a girl from another valley) by the standard she had given him. But a man who was not in love, living in a district where these virtues were not uncommon, might well need further guidance than this; and Christian, finding several girls who appeared to be all that his mother demanded of helpmates, found himself wondering how a man should know the right one to choose, and delayed his wooing a little. "Everything depends on training a lad to have common sense in these matters," his mother explained to other mothers of sons. "Now Christeli will

never be fooled by a girl, and he will make a good husband when he weds."

It was then that Barbara Bandlin, who for three years had been living as a lady's maid in Paris, came home to take care of her parents ; and from the moment she turned her smile upon him (over Kaspar's shoulder, while waltzing), his choice was made, and his mother's wise counsel became folly, and her warnings had no more power with him than hands that would stay the wind.

When Barbara went away, she was a thin, big-eyed country girl; when she came back, she was a pretty coquette. From her feet, in their mischievous little high-heeled shoes, to her eyes, whose glance was half challenge, half caress, she was quite unlike the homely, broad-built women, her neighbors. And as they knew this, and as two or three other young men found her just as desirable as did Christian, there were soon some sturdy jealousies and rivalries afoot. Barbara was in no hurry to end this pleasant

state of affairs by betrothing herself to any one of her admirers ; but she showed by so many tokens her preference for Christian Valär and his sober, masterful wooing, that some of the neighbors already coupled their names. Not so Mother Bandlin : she had made up her mind to have Andres Luzi, the rich farmer, as her son-in-law. When first her mother spoke to her of this, Barbara said she could almost die of laughing at the idea of marrying such a round-faced fellow ; but later she admitted she had not yet betrothed herself to Christian.

Mother Bandlin was sly and patient under her fat. All day long she worked for this end, and prayed for it every night. She ascertained the prices of Andres' gifts to Barbara, repeating them to her with trembling eagerness, to the neighbors with an indifference which hardly hid her swelling heart ; and she kept herself awake during sermon time by reverently speculating about his banking account in Chur.

She had always her sly little smile for Andres, and hints that Barbara loved him more than she ventured to show. For Barbara she had endless chatter about dress and the many pleasures that only money can bring; and she put her own cough to its utmost use and took to grunting painfully about the place, hand on side, as if to suggest how welcome rest would be if she could but afford to take it. The mischief was already at work with the girl, when old Frau Valär fell down in a fit. During the fortnight that Christian was nursing her, Andres Luzi was hardly ever out of the Bandlins' house; and when Christian, who was as sure of Barbara's heart as he was of his own, came away from his mother's grave bent on winning her promise at last, she hurried out to the door to tell him breathlessly that Andres Luzi was within, and that they were just betrothed, adding thereto some foolish, stammering condolences on the loss of his

mother. Christian heard all she had to say, and then, without one word of reply, turned his back on her and went home. He swore in his soul that not she nor any one else should know how far she had fooled and how deeply wounded him; but for all that, a change appeared in him from that day. He went on working as hard as before, but he had small pleasure in his work, and saving, but money meant only ~~comes~~ to him now, and not good gifts and comforts for the woman of his heart. He never blamed Barbara to her face nor behind her back; and if he met Andres in the street, he would nod and wish him good-day just as if he were any other uninteresting fellow. But if he did not choose to betray himself by quarreling with either of these two people, with others he quarreled for little or no reason at all, and took to drinking three *Schoppen* where once he had drunk but one; and so within but few months there came a gradual and unwilling

change in his neighbors' opinion of Christian. "If he'd only marry a girl that would make his home comfortable, he would n't be round at the inn so often," said one; and, "He'll find it hard to get a wife if he don't keep his bad temper out of sight," said another. Old Domenika, who had loved him as a boy, broke in with "He was sober and good tempered enough so long as his mother lived ; it's losing her that's done it." She had no word of blame for the tippler and brawler ; she went round to his desolate home, made it tidy, and mended his ill-kept clothes instead.

But Christian was to disgrace himself further yet. He was invited with all the other friends to Barbara's wedding. He sent his gift,—not the little earrings he had bought to give his wife on her wedding day (these he wrapped up and put away as if they belonged to some one now dead), but an expensive Italian shawl with a fringe. It was fortunate that his work took him away

into Italian Switzerland at that particular time: had he been free, he would certainly have gone to the wedding himself; but whether to show how utterly indifferent he was, or to kill some one, he hardly knew.

Andres and Barbara were married in the first week of the new year, while Christian, in company with other carters, who for greater cheerfulness and safety had timed their homeward journeys together, was bringing Herr Sprecher's wine from his sealed vault in Tirano. His was the first of the nine cask-laden sledges then nearing the summit of the Bernina Pass, and as he plodded sullenly ahead of his companions, he was thinking that in less and less time Andres and Barbara would be coming out of church, in the sight of their Maker and their fellows, man and wife forever. The road was ice upon snow. At the steepest risings the horses strained and struggled, and, spike-shod as they were, could hardly get a foothold. Amid shout-

ing, swearing, sweating, and steaming, the train moved on and up, with occasional halts while the beasts were fed and rested and the men took a pull at their little drinking-kegs just filled at starting with the new, sweet, heady wines of the Valtelline. After one such baiting-time, Christian's horse, the stout-hearted Simon Peter, who till this moment had set the pace and a fine example of plodding pluck to all the horses behind him, slipped in starting and blocked the road by his fall. The carter at his heels vented a deal of Italian blasphemy at the delay, and under pretense of helping to raise the scraping, scrambling beast, kicked him hard in the belly. Christian waited till he had got Simon Peter on his legs, then knocked Antonio down. He was as instantly up again as if he had bounced, and flew wildcat fashion at the burly Graubündener, who gripped him by his filthy sheepskin, raised him high, and pitched him murderously hard upon the

ground — not, however, before the Italian's knife had found flesh through Christian's homespun and splotched the frozen snow with thick red blood. By a miracle the fellow was not killed, but he was terribly lamed, and Christian had to pay damages and go to prison. Frau Bandlin, coming out of church next Sunday and looking extraordinarily respectable, told her gossips that at one time she had thought that Christian and her Babeli fancied each other ; she thanked God she was mistaken, and that her Babeli had not mated with a fellow who so ill fulfilled the promise of his youth. Old Domenika, carrying her great cotton umbrella and her Bible wrapped in a silk handkerchief, was one of the company. When Frau Bandlin added, "Christian was confirmed with our Hans and Peter, and in those days the Herr Pfarrer thought as well of the lad as of my own," Domenika retorted, "Some of us think well still, and with reason, too." Then she

stopped dead in the path, and grounded her umbrella with an emphatic thump. "Can a woman help screaming in labor, I should like to know?" she said, looking keenly from face to face. "No more can Christian help going a bit wild just now, with what he has got to bear." She turned away, muttering to herself; and Frau Bandlin, very red in the face, said, "I should like to know what she means by that!" But she knew quite well, and she did not like it at all.

When Christian came out of prison, he meant to sell his beasts and go away to America, rather than live disgraced in his native place; but he found work awaiting him, and was obliged to go over into Italian Switzerland at once; and there he made no new foes, but found an old friend instead. At the Stella d' Oro he saw, as he had often seen before, Ursula Engi, a Davos girl who was serving-maid in that house. Christian, sore with the sense of being in

disgrace with every one, was shy of meeting her, but he was warmed and comforted by her hearty greeting. As he sat at table, and she brought him food and drink, he looked up humbly and gratefully at the kind eyes and the smile he had hardly noticed of old. They had the look of home to him, and they made him so long for peace and goodness that the tears came up in his eyes. From that moment his love for the faithless Frenchified Barbara went out like a rushlight in a wind, and Ursula Engi filled all his heart. When he was back in Davos, he thought of her so constantly that he knew there would be no peace for him till Simon Peter took him again to Tirano. So he went and told her a long story, confessing how much he had loved Barbara, and how she had deceived him ; that he had sometimes drunk more than he could carry soberly, had grown quarrelsome, nearly killed a man, and therefore been to prison ; that he was full of

shame, and meant to go back to his old sober way of life. Then he asked her could she love him, and would she marry him ? "Yes, indeed, dear Christian," she said, as if there could not possibly be two minds about that. Ursula had no fear : she knew that Christian would not want to drink and quarrel when he was beloved and happy ; she knew too that she would never allow him to drink and quarrel even if he wished to. They agreed to be married the following autumn, when the tourist season was over and Ursula's pocket full of earnings. Brave with his new happiness, Christian went back and faced his neighbors ; nor was it long before they saw that this was the Christian Valär of earlier days come home to them, and not the sullen fellow who went to prison.

The lovers worked and waited cheerfully enough, and at the end of the summer, on a cool September morning, they set out together in the cart he had brought for

her and her simple baggage. Ursula had told Christian that the post was very cheap for Swiss servants returning at the season's end, and that she need not bring him and his horse that weary way. "Keep your money, Ursula," he said, adding, "I've been counting on this drive these six months, girl."

Simon Peter was very slow, the cart creaked and shook, the ascent was very hot, and the summit of the pass was icy cold; but there never was a better pleased pair of travelers. Wherever the road was steepest he walked beside the horse, turning his head from time to time to look at Ursula, happy among her bundles; and although, as he looked at her kind and trustful eyes, he thought how fine it would be to have this girl as his wife, there was something about her too that made him think of his dead mother. He did not say anything about this, but he cracked his whip louder and louder as his heart grew big with desire

to be as good a man to her as ever a man could be. Where the road was easier for Simon Peter, Christian got up into the cart, and they sat holding hands under the big red Italian umbrella ; not saying much, it is true, for the mountain silence around them, the sunshine on their bodies, and the love in their hearts made them too dreamy and peaceful for speech.

At the birth of their first child in the following autumn, Ursula was very ill ; and because he could be of no use to her, and because being useless he could not bear the sight of that agony, Christian went away into the beasts' stall, and there lay against a little calf, covering his ears with his hands, and telling God over and over again how good a man he would be if only He would spare his wife to him. Then came some one and pulled his hands from his ears, and old Domenika fairly screamed, "Praise God, Christeli ! There has come a little son to thee, and Ursula will live." In following

years two other little ones were born and died. Then, when Peterli was four years old, came a girl, Deteli, precious indeed ; and now that she could run and play and talk, a boy-baby, Hami, lay on his mother's breast.

From the midst of the sturdy group of little ones, who kept them so busy and poor and happy, Christian and Ursula looked with pity at their well-to-do neighbors, the Luzis. Their only child had died in its second year, and there coming no other to take his place, poor Barbara filled up her life as best she might. She was not one that could make a housemate of sorrow and grow the better for that comradeship : it would have killed or crazed her. She did not want to die, and life must be happy or it had not been life to her ; so, after her first agony of loss, she turned her back upon grief with the strength of weak creatures fighting for life, hurried from house to house for whatever excitement the little

town could offer, from heart to heart for diversion and sympathy. She begged Andres never to speak of their little child to her, and the good-hearted fellow, blessing God when her pretty looks and manners began to come back again like flowers in spring, most faithfully held his peace ; but sometimes, when she was out of the way, he went up alone to the garret where the empty cradle was standing.

Now Barbara was one who in comforting herself was not likely to notice or care much how far she discomfited others. Little Frau Kaspar was very miserable after she and her newly wedded husband had spent the evening at Luzi's ; and yet, as she said to herself, Toni had not been unkind, and nobody could say that Barbara had behaved otherwise than a respectable woman may ; but the fact remained that the men could think of nobody else when she was about. "It's just a way she's got, I suppose," sighed the poor little bride, and

cried herself to sleep. Yes, Barbara had a way with her, and in consequence more than one sober fellow blundered into sulks and scoldings with his women folk. Even Ursula Valär, who was as sure of her man's heart as that Davos church would not run away, was ruffled by Barbara's behavior at times.

"She's welcome to gossip with you as long as you both will, but why does she slip into the house as soon as I come down the street?" she asked of her husband.

"Does she?" said Christian, puzzled. "She's got no unfriendly feeling to you that I know of."

"Had she any particular news to tell to-day?"

"She'd just got a letter from her brother in America: she was telling me all about his work out there."

That was indeed all they had talked about, and there was no reason in the world why Barbara should go away when

Ursula appeared, nor send that lingering smile over her shoulder, nor wave her hand ; except that Barbara had always been a tease, and that she read novels, and spiced her daily life with romance as other folk salt their victuals.

“ Well, I ’m glad she seems like to have another child,” said Ursula really kindly. “ It ’ll make a better woman of her, I dare say.”

“ Oh, let the poor thing be ! ” said Christian. “ I ’m glad she ’s none of mine, anyhow.”

He spoke so whole-heartedly that Ursula clapped him approvingly on the back, and they laughed together.

In all ways they were happy together save one. From the day of their betrothal Christian would as soon have thought of courting somebody else as of drinking more than he should : such things were not for a man who had won the love of a good girl, and would soon have her and her children to

keep. Then too, be it said, his orderly Uschi, for all her gentle brown eyes, would as soon have endured a mad cow in the house as a drunken fellow; there would have been a few hard words, and prompt handling, and the outer side of the door for such, he knew right well. But on one matter, that of church-going, they were of different minds. Christian had all the Graubündener's respect for religion, but he left its outward observance to his wife as naturally as he left the washing of the children. Women were handier at such things than men, and even took pleasure in them, he reflected. And so when the Sunday for God's service came round, Ursula regularly took his best clothes from the coffer and spread them invitingly upon the bed; but they were generally spread in vain, and however long she delayed her starting, she went to church without him, taking the little ones for company as far as the church door. She could not understand this in

Christian, nor could she quite pardon it either. For herself she would not have missed that Sabbath pause in her busy life — with its stiff, clean clothes, the better food, the sober manners, the prayer and praise, and the quiet time in the sermon whether you understood what was said or not — for any festival you could offer her. It was all so clean and restful and respectable: it pleased God, and probably helped on your own salvation. Nevertheless, when the Pfarrer spoke to her a little sternly about Christian's non-attendance, she fired up and said, "Christian does not often come to church, it is true, but he is a better husband and father than many I know who go there wet or fine! It puzzles me, but so it is, Herr Pfarrer."

If at times there were words between them on the subject of church-going, or upon any other matter, at least they were never heard by their neighbors, and never spoiled a second day; one or other would always give

way rather than that the sun should set upon their divided hearts.

“ Ah ! ” said old Domenika, “ it does one good to go to Valär’s. Here they’ve been married nigh upon ten years, and they never tell tales of each other, nor complain of each other. Why, I’ve seen them more than once, winter nights, sitting on the stove-seat hand in hand, just as though they might be courting still, and that, mind you, with a boy rising nine, and little Deteli, and two children in the churchyard, God bless them ! and another still at the breast.”

CHAPTER II

HARD WORDS WITHIN DOORS

JUNE was come and the sweet warm weather at last. The Alpine grass was springing new and green, gentian and primula grew nigh as thick as the grass itself, water was rushing and singing everywhere. The cattle, long restless, were leaving their winter stalls and wending their happy ways to the sweet upland pastures, and men, women, and children were thankful as they to leave stone houses for wooden huts, the life of the Platz for that of the Dörfli. Many of those who had rights in Sertig were there already, the Büsches, Praders, Fopps, and Luzis. The Tyrolese mowers were at work on the lower slopes, the cheese-making was going forward, and Klasje Michel, whose feeble wits rendered him good for little else, was daily driving the rich milk into Davos.

The winter had been a hard time for the Valärs. Christian had had very little sleigh work among the foreigners that season. And, just as he had undertaken the carting of ice from the Lake to the Kurhaus, he lost the work through an accident which befell him while fetching hay from a chalet on the slope of the Sertig Valley. He was bringing it down in the fashion of the district, by sitting astride the bundle sledge-fashion and rushing over the snow slopes and through the pine woods below, when a pine branch caught him a blow across the eyes before he could duck his head, and threw him blind and bleeding upon the hay track. The fear that he would lose one eye soon passed, but for weeks he must stay at home with bandaged eyes, conscious that Clavadetscher was carting the ice, and pouching the pay as well. Pain and impatience of his own uselessness made him a very babe on Ursula's hands.

“How do you manage, Uschi?” he said

one time, feeling out for her as she passed. "I've brought you no money since I've been like this, but sit at home eating it instead. Yet we've had bacon or soup every day! I can't think how you manage."

"Now don't you talk so much, but eat and grow strong, Christe, man," she said, patting his shoulder and looking with warning eyes at the little ones across the table. She need not have been afraid of the children. When two of their cows went out of milk, and the potatoes were growing few in the cellar, and there was no money coming in at all, she had told Peterli and his sister that so long as their father's eyes were bandaged, she and they must all do their best to make him think they were eating the same dinner as he, when — and this was where the fun came in — they were only having potatoes and coffee all the while! It was quite a game, she said, and if well played would help father to enjoy his dinner and grow

well and strong again. The little ones, who were growing rueful over the plain and none too plentiful fare, cheered up wonderfully at this; and when she saw how the poor meals were sweetened with the relish of exchanged nods, smiles, headshakes, and finger-warnings of secrecy, Ursula thought that the good God could hardly punish her for the deceit. It was harder for her to keep the game going than for the little ones, and one day when she had scolded Deteli for staring so earnestly into the very mouth of little Nik Hermann munching his ample *Schinkenbrod*, she could hardly keep herself from telling her man with tears how poor they were. But she braved it out, and made the children's coffee as sweet as syrup, and told them about that wonderful Christmas tree which is always a-growing in heaven, always filling with toys and candles for the children who are obedient and unselfish in Davos and other such places.

When Christian grew well again, another

mischance befell them ; Bruni the heifer, a bright-eyed, mouse-colored beauty, and Ursula's darling care, brought forth a still-born calf and died of fever herself. By this, poor Christian had fallen so far behind good fortune that if ever he would come up with it again he must make new paths to it ; so when his good friend, the hall-porter of the Belvidere Hotel, promised to find him driving work among the guests who sparsely inhabited the one open wing of the great hotel in summer, he talked it over with Uschi, and the two decided he ought to stay in Davos. The people of Oberamergau were playing their Passion Play, and some of the hotel guests would be wanting to go and see it, and that was a way to earn good money. "Oh, yes, you will do best to stay," said Ursula, after considering the matter. "It might have been different had poor Bruni lived ; but with only three cows, and Peter to help, I shall manage quite well alone in Sertig."

The matter was settled in spring, and now the hurrying weeks and days had brought them up to the eve of the parting. It was a hot June afternoon, Ursula and the children were to start for Sertig early next morning. She was very tired, for she had risen before the sun to put together all that she and they would need in their summer home; and then, feeling very down-hearted at thought of leaving her husband alone, she had cleaned and ordered his home as if she were preparing for a wedding or funeral feast at least. She could not bring herself to use any of the chairs she had scrubbed so hard, but sat on the biggest bundle of luggage, leaning against the wall, patting her fretful baby, and looking about her with weary satisfaction.

Suddenly into the clean-smelling living-room, but with no eyes for its Sabbath air, nor for the tired looks of his wife, came Christian, full of news and moved in manner beyond his wont.

“Klasje is just in with the milk,” he said.
“Andres is dead.”

“Dead?” cried Ursula, horrified. “Dead?
In God’s name, how?”

“He fell from a ledge when he was mowing this morning. The sun must have done it. Anyway he was dead when they picked him up. Barbara’s just like a crazy thing, they say.”

“Oh, Christe, man!” said his wife softly, turning her cheek against the wall, sickening at heart. “Poor woman! poor woman! I don’t know how to bear the hearing of it.”

“You may say that, indeed,” said Christian, striding up and down the room. “You may say that, Uschi.”

The shadow of death had fallen upon their spirits. Christian stood staring out of the window at nothing then within sight of his eyes. Absolutely still from the shock of horror and pity, Ursula actually forgot little Hami till he stirred and cried in her arms. Then she walked about with him until he

slept and she laid him in the cradle. She folded the little day-clothes, and came back across the room to Christian on tiptoe and as if in the presence of something more awful than a sleeping child. Drawing her arm through her husband's arm, she said, "It makes one feel as if anything might happen at any time to wives and husbands." He nodded his head, said nothing, but pressed her arm within his own. They stood so a little in silence, then Ursula, always practical, felt she must break the spell that held them both.

"I think I've made everything clean and comfortable for you," she said, hoping he would turn and look about him a little. The holiday look of the room would please him, his pleasure would cheer herself.

"Do you remember, Uschi," said Christian, still far away in his thought, "when Andres was ill in November, the doctor said his fat was no good to him? Perhaps that made it go harder with him in the sun."

The baby began to whimper again ; Ursula hurried across the room and began to rock the cradle. " Speak a bit softer, Christeli," she said. " Hami's so restless to-night."

" I used to hate Andres once," he said in a lower tone ; " but I never wronged him, and I think I liked him these last years."

" Yes, thank God for that !" said Ursula. With one hand on the cradle, she stretched the other behind to open the cupboard door. There stood the cheese, coffee-jar, platters, and cups, all ready to hand ; and three long brown loaves she had baked that day. She left the door open as if by accident, so that next time he looked round he should see how convenient all stood there within. But he still looked through the window, and when he next spoke he had forgotten the sleeping child and his voice was loud as ever.

" Dying, too, just when they 've got a child !" he said.

“Yes, that’s what I keep thinking too : and Barbara’s had such a time to wait for that, poor soul !”

“Barbara, yes.” Christian, turning from the window at last, saw neither cupboard nor shelf, nor the new-scrubbed chair upon which he did not scruple to set his knee. “Do you know, Uschi, I was just thinking”—

“Sh ! sh ! sh !” went Ursula, rocking the fretting baby. “What were you saying, Christeli ?”

“I was thinking how that she’s nothing to me now, thank God, save as she’s my neighbor, and has been nothing to me for years ; but how strange it was to me for a long time to think of her being Andres’ wife ; and how suddenly it’s just as strange to me to think of her being a free woman again.”

“I don’t see anything strange in it,” said his wife. “Such things are always happening to people like us. You did n’t

say it was strange when my brother Nik was lost in the snow and his wife and children came nigh starving."

"No, it is n't strange, as you say, because such things are always happening in this world. But I was sorry for Nik's wife, and I"—

"I know you did all you could to help her and hers: yes, that is true," added Ursula penitently.

"But it does come strange to me to think of Barbara as a free woman again!" the man blundered on, encouraged by her gentler tone.

Ursula was tired to death. She was nursing a hungry baby; she had risen before dawn and worked hard all day, and as yet had found no thanks for her pains; and now, on the eve of her parting, her man was just full of the girl who, for all her sorrow, had treated him worse than Ursula could have treated a dog.

"Well, well," she said sharply, "I'm

very sorry for Barbara, and there's an end of it. But she's a rich woman,— and I hope I can honestly say, thank God for that!— and she's one that would wed in a year or so, rather than live unhappy. And she could choose her man, I dare say. You said yourself, only the other week, how she keeps her young looks and her white hands."

"Well, it's true about the looks of her," said Christian, a little discomfited by so much eloquence.

"And other women might keep their young looks if they lived for them, and let others milk the beasts, and wash and scrub, and work in the fields, perhaps," said poor Ursula, looking at her rough, red hands. "But what's the use of talking? She may be a free woman as you call it,— though I think it's more respectable to call her a widow,— but you're no free man."

By this time Christian thought he saw the source of her ill-humor and its drift, and because he knew himself a good husband

and father, was surprised and angered as well. He broke into a great laugh that did not ring merrily. "I believe you 're going on like this because I loved a girl before I loved you! Come, come, Uschi, is n't that the matter?"

"I 'm not a fool," she said, with flaming cheeks. But in her heart she blamed him. Every woman feels her man should have held his heart virgin until she came along.

"Well, then, be sensible, and don't make a sour face for nothing," he said, half impatiently, half coaxingly.

"You 're no free man," she said, struggling to speak, for indeed she was choking with weariness, tears, and desire for comfort. "But I dare say you wish you were." It was one of those things we say between hope and despair, a bait which we throw out to catch the love and reassurance which will set all right again, but which only too often hooks and lands a very monster of cruelty.

Suddenly Christian was filled to the very brim of his heart with black wrath at her injustice. It was true he had once loved Barbara, and it was true Barbara showed she remembered the fact, although his love for her was as dead as the flowers in last year's hay. He never sought speech with her, never danced with her, and however hard she tried to claim them, he gave her no more of his eyes in passing than he gave Domenika, or fat Mother Bandlin ; and all because from the day he wooed Ursula she had filled and satisfied his heart.

He did not answer her angrily ; but he acted with the fine cruelty of slow and gentle natures at bay. He got up and moved towards the door. "What is the use of wishing ?" he said, so simply and convincingly that it had been kinder to strike her down at his feet. "One makes the best of these things." He went out, shutting the door quietly behind him, leaving her alone with these wicked words.

CHAPTER III

HARD WORDS WITHOUT DOORS

THE evening meal had long been spread ; Deteli and Hami were both fast asleep ; and Ursula, after two hours of heart-rending anger and misery, would rather have been at peace with her Christeli than crowned the queen of the world. Given time and silence, the sense of hurt can so easily turn to remorse ; a loving heart is ever ready to protect itself from the cruelty it cannot bear from the beloved, by taking all the blame upon itself. If Christeli would but come in, she thought, she saw as in a picture what would happen. She would just throw her arms about him and take back any ill words she had said that day, and he too would take back his last words, telling her they were only the foolishness of anger, and had no truth in them at all ; and so there would

be no more time wasted in quarreling that precious night. But if Christeli came in and neither then nor after could take back his last words, she could not foresee what would happen ; it was all thick darkness after that.

There was a sudden whirring overhead, and the cuckoo came out of his hole in the top of the clock and called out lustily seven times ; and then, as if for the sake of catching the last daylight for her knitting, she went out of the silent room and joined a gossiping group of neighbors at the door, and threw a quick glance up and down the street. Little Peter was there having a lesson in long whip-cracking from Seppi Hermann.

“ This is the children’s time of year,” said Zuse, the Hermanns’ grandmother. “ If we kept them in prison, they could n’t be gladder to go up to the pastures ! ”

At this moment Christian, strolling round the corner of the house, joined the group,

greeting the neighbors but taking no notice of his wife. At sight of him she was full of hope and fear, and was glad to hide her reddening face by turning towards little Peter.

“Yes, Peter is thinking of nothing but Sertig, and how he is going to help me drive the beasts thither and keep the house, and be my good little man,” she said.

By this time the devil had got Christian well under control. He lolled up against the door with hands in pockets, and looked about the sky as if for weather signs.

“Peter is n’t going to the Dörfli for a few days yet,” he said, addressing no one in particular. “I don’t know when I can spare him.”

Ursula lost all her embarrassment in wonder. She stared at him open-mouthed. The thing had been planned and settled weeks ago.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “You’re joking, are n’t you, Christe?”

“What do I mean? Just what I say, my dear.”

“Why, but, Christe, I’ve tied his things up — why, we’ve talked of it times and again — why” —

“May be; but I’ve changed my mind, because it doesn’t suit me to let him go,” he went on. “If Peter is useful, I may want him some while. You can have Klasje for a bit. If Peter’s a good boy, I’ll take him with the gentlefolk to Oberammergau.”

Peter could contain himself no longer. He burst into a howl of disappointment. Christian, whose heart in closing against his wife had turned unconsciously to his child for comfort in such unusual plight, was stung by this surprising behavior; he had thought to give the child a treat. He turned upon Peter with what to his neighbors appeared most disproportioned anger. “And if he blubbers,” he said, giving the little fellow such a shove that he nearly fell, “he shall have a thrashing instead.”

Ursula was still too bewildered to choose her words or remember the presence of her neighbors.

“In God’s name, Christe,” she said, “why did n’t you make up your mind before? Though even then I don’t see how I could have spared him. And Klasje! what use is he? Just think. When I’m out with the beasts, who’s to mind Hami? Deteli’s too little, and”—

“And who then, in God’s name, will do anything to help me?” he interrupted roughly. “A comfortable home it will be for me—out driving all day, and no company when I get back, no cooking, no one to keep the place tidy. I shall keep the boy.”

Ursula’s dark cheek flushed. “You want him for pleasure, I want him for hard work. You talk like a madman to-night.”

By this time Christian was so angry he had lost sight of all truth, and simply sought for the hardest words to strike

with. He would show these people he was no wife-ridden man, but master of his home and children.

“You want Peter because he whines to go with you. You would do anything to keep the children all to yourself. As to Peter, you are making but a poor mother-child of him as fast as you can.”

“You were ever a mother’s child yourself!” said Ursula, stung in her turn to untruth and injustice; “and will grizzle and cry till you get what you want.”

By this time old Hänschi had shuffled off out of hearing, and Hermann was sauntering after him. Then Zuse went indoors, but both Christian and Ursula knew she was well within hearing and meant to hear the dispute out. This thought, with the sight of the retreating men, filled Ursula with a sudden shame. She and her man had differed now and again, it is true, but never in the presence of others. As for Christian’s words about Barbara that after-

noon, mean what they might, her heart could not bear the thought of them just then ; but this difference about Peter could and should be settled at once. So, in unconscious recognition that every witness of a quarrel is a hindrance to mending the quarrel, she said loud enough for Zuse to hear, "We won't get flurried about it, Christe. I dare say after a little I can spare the boy. And I only meant to say I have left things orderly and comfortable, and if you want a bit of company and hot supper any time, you must n't forget that the inn is handy."

The publicity that had shamed her into gentle speech only hardened the man's heart. He was no weakling to be rated one moment and coaxed the next, and his neighbors should see it.

"Keep your spoiled baby," he said harshly. "I don't want him. And keep your good advice, for I don't want that either."

She made no reply this time; she was well nigh at an end of her patience and hope; she had no more words for him that could be spoken in old Zuse's hearing. "Come, Peter," she said to the boy, who was still sniffing and wondering what had come over his parents. The two went into the house together, and Christian strolled in the direction of the inn.

It is never an easy matter to end a quarrel; that is why it is such a pity to begin one. But when you have quarreled before your children and friends, it is harder than ever. It is as if all the several witnesses were thrusting the two hearts asunder, which, had they only sinned in their own hearing, might so easily have forgiven and kissed and come together again.

Christian spent the rest of the evening in the inn, where he beat the schoolmaster at draughts so persistently and with such harsh relish of his victories, that the little man began to imagine a personal spite some-

where, and peered a little distressfully over his spectacles at the big adversary who had so spoiled his quiet evening and favorite game. When Christian went home, his set face forbade the friendly words which Ursula strove to bring across her lips. When they went to bed, he turned his face one way upon his pillow, and she turned her face the other way upon her pillow, and for the first time since their marriage night, not one "Good-night," nor "God keep you!" was spoken between them. She lay long awake, and wondered that a man could fall asleep so quickly, and even snore, when he was all at sixes and sevens with his wife! She touched his arm once, but he turned upon his side without waking, and she herself fell asleep at last. When she awoke in the morning, Christian was already up and gone. She dressed hurriedly, made the coffee, and sent the little ones to search for him in the stalls and cellar. But they could not find him, and he did not come. She beat the bed-

ding and hung it out of the window to air, and called the little ones to breakfast. All the while she was listening for a footstep at the door, and more than once she went out and looked both up and down the street.

CHAPTER IV

THEY SAY GOD GIVES WITH BOTH HANDS IN THE BEAUTIFUL SERTIG VALLEY

AT seven o'clock that morning Ursula and her children set out for Sertig Dörfli in Flury Gadmer's cart. Two days before, Flury had offered to find room for them and their belongings among the bedding he was going to carry out to Sertig; and as Christian must have lost a day's work with his gentlefolk had he himself driven his family, the offer was gratefully accepted. Even after their luggage was safely bestowed, and when Peter, driving Fleck and Bärli, was well out of sight, Ursula still waited in hopes of her husband's coming. Although at first she had repented her unjust words of the day before, Christian's treatment of her ever since was working a gradual mischief in her soul. Conscious of her first desire for reconciliation, she forgot she had never

asked his pardon in so many words ; and his persistent sulkiness had first chilled her loving penitence, then set her questioning the need for it, and now, with every moment that he stayed away, made it easier for her to believe that her words about Barbara were not so wholly unjust after all. But, for all that, she would not leave their home without one word of good-by from him, and she thought he would surely never let her do so. And yet, she considered bitterly, anything might happen nowadays when a man and his wife could go to sleep without so much as one "Good-night," and "God keep you," spoken between them !

The worst of it was, she could not tell Flury why she lingered, and so must needs make one excuse after another for delaying the start. After a last vain visit to the stall and woodhouse, she came out, helped Deteli to scramble into the cart, and holding little Hami close to her breast, climbed slowly in herself. Hardly had Flury cracked

his whip and the horse begun to move, than, "Stop ! stop !" cried Ursula suddenly. "I am so sorry, but I have forgotten something !" She hurried back into the house, and remained there several minutes. When she came out, she had in her hand a large colored neckerchief, and she offered it to Deteli, saying, "I could n't find it at first. If you feel the sun, tie it over your head."

Deteli stared at her and at the kerchief. It was a black silk square, with great red roses on an orange border. Christian had bought it in Poschiavo for his wife, and she never wore it save at festivals, or when she went to partake of the holy communion.

"I have kept you so long !" she said to Flury, looking up the street, and then down the street, for the last time ; and when they drove away, her head was over her shoulder till the turn of the road shut their home from sight. They were starting over half an hour later than the time Christian had told them to be ready, and still he had not come.

They came upon Peter just after they crossed the Landeswasser and turned into the Sertig Valley. The beasts were keeping the little fellow very busy. Only just released from their long captivity in stall, they ran and roamed hither and thither, now bellowing, now tearing the tender herb. Bärli, the younger, skipped about more like a lamb than the respectable mother of two fine calves. Although it was but eight o'clock, Peter was already hot with his endeavor to keep them to the road.

“Do you let me drive the beasts for a little, Peterli,” said the mother, “and come you here and hold little Hami for me.”

But Peter was far too happy in his labors, and besought her to stay where she was. Anna Marie, Flury’s old mare, was heavy laden, and the road was gradually rising all the way; so by dint of coaxing, shouting, and driving, he continued to keep the beasts well within sight of the cart.

It was a radiant morning, occasionally cooled by a light rain that was mistily blown down the valley from the snow-hills at its head, and that in passing left every bough, leaf, and blade twinkling and shining in the sun. Gentian, clover, and rampion grew thickly in the grass, clothing the slopes with color and scent till they touched the feet of the pine woods higher up, and there gave ground to the Alpine rose and whortleberry. Now and again the road, going straighter than the noisy torrent, left it out of sound and sight; but Peter was always glad whenever at a sudden bend the water-music filled their ears again, for the sound of it kept his young heart drumming with joy. And indeed there is no more cheery company than a mountain stream that meets and greets and passes, but never leaves you all the way. Water was everywhere, leaping in torrents from the heights over boulder and ledge, drooping in slow, fine falls that

looked as if they could never reach the ground, yet blowing aside like curtains in the slightest breeze, and rushing in little rills through grassy channels above and below the road ; and their tiny tinkling trebles and thundering bass made him feel brave and happy as ever was soldier marching with pipes and drums.

The Sertig Valley is blessed indeed, rich in forest and pasture, and set about with the mighty hills whose high snows purify and sweeten the breath of the world, and who store eternally and eternally give forth the wealth of waters which, whether they creep in a frozen silence, or rush and roar, or chatter and sing and sob, still move forever down to their holy work of quenching man's thirst and washing away his stains.

“They say God gives with both hands in the Sertig Valley,” said Flury. The day and the place had moved his quiet heart. “I think they may well say that.” And he nodded at the glorious pastures above them.

“Surely, surely,” said Ursula ; but she said no more. Flury was sociably inclined, and would have been glad to gossip a little. Ursula had been good to his wife in her last illness, and was, besides, a pleasant, comely woman, nearing thirty, but with eyes as young and clear as little Deteli’s. Her mouth and chin betokened a resolute will, but when she smiled they showed the beauty of beaming kindness and the gleam of good white teeth. When she was a serving-maid in Tirano, people would often call her “child,” and “little maid,” because of those young eyes ; but when the head waiter tried to meddle with her, he found her a woman grown, and dared not touch her again. A friend counseled her to leave the *Stella d’Oro* after that. “It is not for me to leave,” she said. “I have done nothing but what an honest, religious girl may.” So she stayed. The landlord raised her wages without being asked to do so, nor from that day did any one behave

unseemly by the bright-eyed girl from over the hills.

By nine o'clock the last of the showers was over, and the sun, taking the valley all to himself, filled it to the brim, a cup of glory. The heat shimmered above the ground, the grasshoppers leaped and crackled, all the flower-set grass was quivering and humming with small, busy lives. Once Flury put the reins in Ursula's hands while he helped Peter with the beasts; but for all her coaxing and shrill scolding, the horse moved only at a snail's pace, and at last, refusing to stir at all, stood still, hanging her head.

"Are we, then, so heavy a load?" asked Ursula anxiously, when Flury came up with them again.

"Oh, no; this is only one of her cunning tricks, the old mare!" said Flury, with a sort of pride. And sure enough, moved by some magic of mastery in his voice, without persuasion of whip or touch on rein, old

Anna Marie broke into a comfortable, unflagging trot. At this rate they left poor Peter far behind, and were obliged in a little while to pull up and wait till he came in sight.

“Come here, Peterli,” called his mother; and as he drew near she cried, “Come here and take Hami for me, and let me guide Fleck and Bärli.”

“You need not think I am weary,” he replied. He was hot and red, the sweat ran into his eyes, and he draggled his feet.

“Perhaps not,” said Ursula; “but my arms are cramped with holding the little one. Come up, there’s a good lad.”

“Oh, well, then, I will hold Hami!” said Peter, and got into the cart with a sigh of relief which sounded in spite of himself. Peter was only ten years old, but he could tend and milk cattle, cut wood, sleigh, and climb with boys half as old again, and he did not like being beaten over anything he took in hand. He was

very like his mother in this, and that was why she covered his retreat with this excuse.

And now the wide pastoral valley began to draw together, until it narrowed to a gorge, the ground here rising so rapidly that the stream came leaping down steep stony stairs toward them through a dark, sweet-smelling pine-wood. They could hardly hear each other speak beside the stream with its flying spray and clear sheets of water pouring over rounded rocks into the seething pools beneath. Just below its stairway the stream divided and ran on each side of a little island full of pines ; but its two arms were in such haste to clasp hands again that the island was very small indeed.

“Wouldn’t it be fine to live on that island always ?” said Peter, pointing it out to his mother.

“Yes, fine !” she said, never looking aside at it ; her mind was other where.

“Would you live there alone ?” said

Flury. "It looks a likely place for *Wildmännli!*!"

"I should n't care," said Peter. But he thought to himself he would rather not live there by night, only by day.

After that the good mother would not ride any more. The two cows had run off their first excitement, and they paced demurely before her as she walked in front of the cart. Seen from the back and afoot like this, Ursula looked like a woman of forty years or so. She was not fat, but she had the square frame of the peasant and worker in the fields, and the plodding walk of the burden-bearer. This made the surprise of her beautiful young eyes and smile all the pleasanter when she turned and faced one. But to-day she did not smile; nor, when she gave the children their milk and slices of bread, did she eat any herself.

Once when there sounded a great jingling of bells behind them, she turned to look so sharply that she stumbled on a big

stone in the road. It was only Buol's cart. Peter's eyes looked wonderingly at hers, which had suddenly filled with water. "I hurt my foot a little bit," she said.

"Well, do come up into the cart, then," said the boy, surprised that his mother should shed tears for pain as children do.

"Oh, it will soon be quite well," she replied. "If I walk, it will not grow stiff."

Above the gorge the valley was very different in character: high uplifted, treeless, very stony in parts, and with three high peaks completing its cul-de-sac. There was a bare bit of road, a bend, and then they were in sight of the Dörfli, with its little church shepherding a dozen or so of huts set in green meadows. At the sight of the belfry, Peter, with the baby in his arms, stood up among the bundles and shouted for joy, giving the shrill broken cry of the mountain child. He was answered by a yodel from some lads who were unharnessing a horse by the door of the inn, and

as they entered the village, several neighbours, who had arrived a few days earlier, greeted them from open doors and windows. Three women were chatting at the trough by the village fountain, where old Domenika was washing some baby clothes. Domenika was old and wrinkled ; she had the great disfigured throat (so common among her countrywomen) bulging over her blue kerchief, and she had lost all her teeth ; but her heart was so good that no age or decay could hinder it from looking through her eyes and making them beautiful. She nodded to Flury, and spoke to the woman who was driving the cows.

“ You look tired, Uschi,” she said. “ Have you been afoot all the time ? ”

“ Oh, no,” said Ursula, wiping her moist face with her apron. “ Peter’s done nearly all the hard work. But I am tired a bit, somehow.”

“ Hei ! Uschi,” cried one of the other women, “ have you heard the news ? ”

“What, of poor Andres’ death? Yes, indeed.”

“No, about Barbara; she’s very bad. It’s driven the milk away, and as for the child, it will take nothing else.”

“Cannot *you* wean it, Domenika? You can do anything with our babies!”

“But what can I do with a child that is sick, sick, all the time? It will certainly die.”

“Oh dear!” said Ursula, “and what will Barbara do?”

“If the child dies,” said old Domenika, “Barbara will die too. The child is all she has left.”

It was disconcerting to have come all that way to find every one full of thought and pity of her enemy, just when she was beginning to think herself the most pitiable woman in the world.

“Well, well!” said Ursula, “what things do happen in this world!” and she passed on.

CHAPTER V

THE POISONOUS FRUIT OF STRIFE

THE Valärs' dwelling in the Dörfli was a small hut, consisting of one living-room with a stable underneath. You could smell the sweet summer breath of the cattle when you raised a little door in the floor ; and if he woke in a very dark night, Peter would stretch out his arm and open it, so that the homely sounds of their breathing and rustling in the litter might keep him company till he went to sleep again. He slept in one corner of the room, his mother and the little ones in another, and in a third stood a large crock basin and jug for washing purposes. A table and chairs, some cups and platters on a shelf, and, on the covered balcony outside, the wooden pails, bowls, and other dairy vessels which were set there to sweeten after every use and scrubbing, made up the

summer home of the Valärs. And having seen this, you had seen every other in the Dörfli, with the exception of Sprecher's, or Luzi's, which stood next Valär's, and contained two large rooms with stabling for at least a dozen cattle below and a fine loft overhead.

The night was dark and still; there was no moon nor any breath of wind. When Ursula went to bed, she could not sleep. For one thing her body was so tired, and for another her heart was so divided; at one moment it was running back to Davos crying to her Christe for forgiveness and peace, the next she plucked it back again with the remembrance of his strange and harsh behavior. And thus without speech she communed and argued with herself in the lonely night.

“When I think that he could let us go like that, unblessed, unsped of any kiss or good wish, I don't know myself or him, I can't see my way, I can't find my Christe

in such behavior at all. I might have been ever so sorry for anything wrong which I did, but he gave me no chance of making my peace with him. It almost seems as if it was useless to try to make peace. . . . And yet it *can't* be useless after all these years together, if only I could hap on the right way to set about it! . . . But why should I be puzzling my brains to make peace? I was not nearly so much to blame as he!" She asked herself this question many times, but the same answer came up again, whether she would or no. "Why? Because I love Christe, and cannot be at enmity with my husband."

Backwards and forwards she thought and felt, felt and thought, and then she determined to tell herself the whole dreary tale over from the beginning; because, as she said, "When you see the beginning of a thing quite plain, you can often foresee the end. And if you remember the way you came, you can go back along your steps if

there's nothing better to be done. Well, I'm sure I'll take back any words I can, in honesty, if I can but call them to mind. Let me see, how did it all come about? First, in comes Christe and tells me about poor Andres, and I said I was so sorry for Barbara, and we spoke about the baby. There was nothing but right and proper and friendly both sides in all that. Then he says that about Barbara being a free woman. 'And now it seems stranger than ever to think of her being free again,' says Christe. He didn't say 'a widow;' and although *I* knew, and every one else knew, he had n't had a thought for Barbara save in a neighborly way this ten year or more, still somehow I could n't help catching him up short just there. Any other time I should not have thought about it, very like, for I never did worse than get vexed with Barbara before; only I was so tired just then, and Christe might have seen that, I should think. Well, but if *I did* give him

bad words then,—‘I dare say you wish you were a free man!’ I said,—he gave me back worse, much worse. ‘What’s the use of wishing? What’s the use of wishing?’ so quiet and sad he said it, not angry, but just like that, as if the truth *must* come over his lips at last; and then he goes out and leaves me.”

Ursula had set out to tell herself the story, honestly hoping to find more fault in herself than Christian, or to come upon a mistake which, acknowledged, might bring them together into their customary goodwill and understanding. But her clear memory of those words, and the manner in which Christe said them, blew cold upon her reviving hope, and thrust her back into doubt and anger again. For a long time she could go no further than that point in the story, but lay staring into the darkness, remembering and repeating, until her eyes ached along with her heart.

Now Ursula was the mother of every

needy or suffering child, and yet when a little infant now began to cry in a neighbouring hut, her ears told her brain but little, and her heart nothing at all about it. But although she did not know it, the break in the silent night sent her on with her story-telling.

“ I was sorry enough by the next time we met, and ready to be friends again, and hoping Christe would tell me he did n’t mean what he had said ; and at that very moment he says he ’s going to keep Peter with him in Davos ! I was so surprised and put about, and then I got angry again before I knew, and I know I rated him before Zuse and the others. I wish I had n’t done that. I was ashamed directly I ’d said what I said. But, after all, what could he expect, talking of taking the lad from me at the last moment, and me with both hands over-full already ? ”

With the best will in the world, she could not help finding two wrongs in Christian

for every one in herself ; but it so discomfited her to be angry with him that she would have been glad to find all the blame lying at her own door.

The infant's voice could still be heard. It was a faint sound, repeated again and again in a weak, miserable way, as if some puny thing would fain ease itself in a great burst of crying, and had not the strength to do so. Ursula at last began to think about the noise she had listened to for several minutes already. "Poor lamb!" she said, and put out a hand to feel for little Hami in his cradle. Then she drifted back into her own troubles.

"I wonder if I could have made peace with Christe that night if I had tried again? I *did* mean to ; while he was still at the inn I said to myself, 'When he comes in I 'll say something friendly ; ' but he looked so hard, I could n't begin. Then I said to myself, 'When we go to bed I 'll say, "Good-night, Christe, God keep you," and that 'll

be a beginning ;' but when he turned right away on the pillow, the kind words seemed to choke me and go right back into my heart. Then I lay awake, and I kept saying to myself, 'We can never sleep through the night like this, like a couple of heathens, Christe and me ; by and by he 'll wake, and we shall both say we are sorry, and I shall give him a kiss.' But he didn 't wake, not even when I touched him ; and at last I could n 't help falling asleep. Then in the morning I said to myself, 'He 'll never let us, Hami and all, go away without bidding good-by ; never mind how he looks or behaves, I 'll say something kind directly he comes, for whether he 's most wrong, or I 'm most wrong, or whether he still loves me, or he does n 't, we must n 't part without a word between us.' But he never came ; he never gave me a chance of saying I was sorry for my share. — God knows what Flury could have thought of it all ! It 's a fine story to run among the

neighbors ! And Christe 's the last man in the world to bear his neighbors' gossiping about him and me. When he finds they 're saying how Christe and Uschi fell out and did n't speak, he 'll blame me in his mind for beginning it all, and that 'll make it harder than ever to come together again. — But what fool is mishandling that poor child ?" she suddenly thought across her other thoughts, for she could still hear the faint pulses of pathetic crying, though they were growing ever feebler and feebler. She sat up listening intently, and could hear a woman talking and crooning to the child. " It 's Barbara's baby ! " she thought, and lay back on her pillow. With Barbara's name her mood grew suddenly darker. " Barbara ! ah, that 's it ! It 's not so much a matter of finding who 's most to blame, Christe or me, it 's Barbara that 's the root of the whole mischief ! As far back as I can remember, she was always a selfish sort of girl, always one for the boys and men,

always feeding her vanity at the cost of other folks' peace. Even after she was Luzi's wife, she was always more fond of dressing — and dancing and gossiping too, with other folks' husbands — than a decent married woman can understand ; and in such a mighty hurry, too, to run away did you but come in sight yourself ! It's all very well to say that Christe was always steady and true since he wed me ; so he was ; but what made Barbara behave like that with him ? And why, when he saw she behaved so, did he do more than nod and pass her by with a neighborly greeting, instead of prating, and hearing her tell about her brother in America, and God knows what beside ? ”

In the night, misery is always more miserable, injury ten times crueler to bear ; in the night, suspicion, that evil seed which germinates the faster for the absence of the sun, springs and opens its black flower, and bears the bitter fruit of certainty

in an unseemly haste impossible to good and wholesome seeds. Thus in that lonely night, Ursula was full of thoughts she had never thought before, and, thick as bees, there came swarming all about her such doubts, fears, suspicions, and at last beliefs, that she could hardly keep herself from screaming outright. She lay awake, hating Barbara as she had never thought to hate any fellow-creature,—hating her for her good looks, for her tricky ways, and now even for her sorrows, because they had won her Christian's thought and pity,—till soul and body ached with the strength of her hate.

She drew the bedclothes suddenly about her ears as the infant began to whimper again after a few minutes of silence. “Yes, it’s all her fault. If it had n’t been for Barbara, I should n’t have taunted Christian with not being a free man. It was just because she is what she is that such an idea came into my head, for Christe

would never have said, ‘What’s the use of wishing?’ Oh, that *was* a dreadful thing to say! And even if he didn’t mean it, who knows but what he will come to mean it, now that I’ve put the ill thought in his mind to waken the ill wish in his heart! Men are like that, they say; and Barbara *is* pretty,— and I, who am but a homely woman at all times, lie here growing older and uglier every moment simply with thinking these things; and she all the while, that woman!” — and by now her raging heart sent her breath short through her clenched teeth, — “with her fine hands, and her mincing ways, and her high heels, and her eyes for every man! Ugh! I would n’t be such as she for all the harvests of the year, nor yet for all the cattle in Graubünden!” But a moment later, “Would n’t I?” she wondered. “Not if I knew my Christe would think more of me for being such? I never thought of it before! I wonder! I don’t know! God forgive me!”

Even through the bedclothes she could hear the crying now. "I wonder if a light-o'-love" (she had never before put this bad name to her neighbor) "like her really grieves when her man dies? Would she feel like me if her baby died? — Perhaps sorrow will spoil her looks and make her a homely woman, after all!"

But here the devil had gone too far with Ursula. She started up in bed, instantly ashamed of the base thought that was so nearly a wish, and went through the penance she sometimes laid upon herself by pinching her arm where the dog bit and the doctor burnt her after. She did it fiercely two or three times. "There, there, there, you pig!" she said. "Oh, Uschi, Uschi! what's coming over you? — and you the mother of two of God's angels in heaven!" She buried her face in the pillow, and lay for some time without moving, sick with fear of herself and hot with shame.

Presently little Hami stirred and began to fret; she rose, lifted him from his cradle, and fed him. "It's a wonder your milk does n't poison your own Hami, you wicked woman!" she said to herself.

As she sat on the bedside rendering this motherly service, she began to feel more peaceful than she had felt for twenty-four hours at least. She still heard the crying at intervals, and raising her head to look through the window, she saw a light burning in the window of Luzi's hut. "Whatever should I do if Hami cried like that!" she thought; "if I could not feed him, and he would take no other food? Yet, that's what's happening over there, with Barbara's baby; and Domenika says it will die if it does not take better to its food. If my Hami were dying! But, thank God, there is no need to think of that; he is very strong, and already takes kindly to cows' milk when I give it to him. But it is dreadful for any mother to lose her

baby — dreadful, I can well believe, even for a woman like that ! Yes, just in this way, I could be sorry for poor Barbara."

(Ah, Hami, Hami, what were you doing ? Were you drawing away the cruelty from your mother's heart, in that quiet food, little child ?)

" Yes, and the more I think of it, the more sorry I am for Barbara. And the child — it has never harmed any one, poor lamb, and might enjoy its life as well as my Hami ! Has everything been tried for it, I wonder ? Let me see, let me see. Sugar-water in a spoon ; and a finger dipped in sweet milk ; and then there 's — but after all, who can teach Domenika any new weaning trick, she who is so baby-wise ? Still, surely there might be, there *must* be, other things to do, if we could but think of them. When Hänschi spat everything else out of his mouth, mother tied a raisin in a rag and he sucked that and liked it. Has Domenika tried a raisin ? I 've a good mind

to go and remind her of that, directly Hami 's asleep."

(You were not very hungry, little Hami ; you fell asleep in a very few minutes, but the feel of your innocent cheek and hand went on with your excellent work, you little witch-babe !)

With every moment Ursula was becoming less like the woman who had lain in bed hating her neighbor an hour ago. With every moment her heart grew kinder and fuller, and was now so busy searching out ways of helping that neighbor that it had no room nor leisure more for hate. "Hami may be strong and healthy," she thought, "but I have lost Margot and Nik, and I know what it is to lose children." And thereupon she thought of Christian, not as she had thought a little while since ; she could remember nothing now but his goodness and kindness, could only remember how, when Margot died, and he and she had meant to watch all night beside the lit-

tle body hand in hand, she fell asleep at last in that blessed presence, and how he never slept one moment, her poor, sad, good Christe, but sat rigid and cramped with his hand in hers all night long rather than waken her in shifting it. And that was the Christe she had been so angry with ! And over there was the mother she had hated, who perhaps would soon see just such a cold, cruel dawn as that which had wakened Ursula from a merciful dream to the sight of her little dead baby.

“Oh, Hami, what *can* we do ?” she said, hugging him close. And he must have answered her, for upon the instant she knew the best thing to do. It was so simple, so easy, so sensible, that she almost laughed to think she had not found it out before ; and then her heart grew so full that she wanted to go down on her knees by the bed, say her prayers, and ask the Heavenly Father to forgive her sins.

But since she knew there was no time to

spare if she would turn death back from her neighbor's threshold, she said her prayers as she walked softly and quickly to and fro hushing little Hami. Directly she knew he was asleep, she laid him down. Then she dressed herself in trembling haste, opened the door, and ran quickly across the dewy grass to the door of Luzi's dwelling.

CHAPTER VI

URSULA RENDERS HER ENEMY A SERVICE AND THEN BEGINS TO LOVE HER

THE child was crying so loudly that although she knocked twice upon the door, she heard no response, so opened it and went in. Then she knew that the light she had seen was the light that keeps a dead man company for the last time. To-morrow Andres Luzi would be in the dark house of the grave, and to-night his body was lying here upon the table, covered with a sheet, through which she could see that still stiffness of limb and feature which is so unlike sleep. In her care for the little new life, Ursula had forgotten that death was already in that hut, until she almost stumbled up against the body. For a second she was afraid. But the new life was calling her, and with beating heart she crossed the floor on tiptoe to the door of the inner room.

Her first impulse was to go in at once and so be rid of that quiet company behind her, but a sudden shyness in her errand fell upon her, holding her even more strongly than her fear, and for a minute at least she stood undecided. The door was just ajar, and to the sound of the crying child was added that of sighing, and sometimes sobbing, which ceased only when the sufferer spoke.

“ Give her to me again, Domenika,” said Barbara’s voice. “ Perhaps she will take it from me.”

“ No, no, she is growing warmer now ; it is better for me to hold her, — so ! ”

“ You are hard, Menga ; you mean to be kind, but you are hard. Oh dear ! oh dear ! ”

“ Hush, *Töchterli.*¹ I am doing my very best for the little one. See, I am just going to try again with the spoon. Come, then, my baby ! come, thou little lamb, little calf, kidling ! come, sweeting ! There, there, there ! ”

¹ Little daughter.

There was an expectant silence of a second or so, and then the mother's voice trembled with eagerness as she asked, "She *did* swallow, just one drop? Just one drop this time, I am certain. Oh! do say she did, Menga dear, Menga darling! And, Menga, did you put *plenty* of sugar in it?"

Again there was a pause before Domenika said quietly and desperately, "No, that's of no use either; not a bit."

"But see, the spoon is empty! she must have swallowed some. I tell you she *must* have swallowed some!"

"You did n't see it dribbling out of the corners of her mouth. It ran out just as it would out of a doll's face. She does n't swallow; she does n't seem to know what it means."

Ursula heard Barbara fling herself back in her bed. "She will die, she will die!" she moaned, beating the bedclothes with her hands. "And if she dies, I die; or if I do not die, I will kill myself. Oh, merciful God, help me somehow!"

Then Ursula lost all uncertainty and shyness. She pushed open the door, and without looking at Domenika, who, with the child in her arms, stood black against the lamplight behind her, she hurried over to the bed. Barbara, flung face downwards, did not know she was there until she touched her shoulder. "Babeli!" she said.

The other started and stared at her visitor through her tears. "Babeli!" she repeated after her from sheer surprise at the sound, for Ursula had not called her by that name since they had gone sleighing together as children. "Uschi!" she cried quickly, and began to button her night-dress and smooth her hair with her hands.

"I heard the little one crying," said Ursula, "and I thought maybe I could do something to soothe it. Some folk say I can bewitch their babies!"

"You are kind," said the poor mother despairingly; "it is not soothing she needs, it's food!" She began to cry again, and

her voice rose in hysterical shrillness as she went on. "How can one soothe a starving child? It's food she needs, I tell you."

"Give her to me, Menga, little mother," said Ursula beseechingly. Old Domenika obeyed, and Ursula, murmuring and crooning to the hapless infant in her arms, went back into the other room. She was not fearful of the dead man now; she was trying to save his child, and the three were fitting company, she thought, nor could he feel any disrespect in her presence. Barbara and Domenika watched her go through the door, the one in a kind of wondering despair, the other in wondering hope. The crying ceased for a second; began again; ceased while you might sigh three times; began again in a strange, smothered fashion; and then ceased altogether. A few more moments passed before Ursula came back again and walked over to the bed. "See, poor Babeli!" she said tenderly; she was shaking with excitement. "You were quite

right, it was food she needed; and now she has it, and shall have it, and will live. See, see!" With a beautiful pride she opened her shawl and showed the little child at her breast, already well on the way to satisfaction.

Old Domenika turned away and began to fold up clothes. But Barbara gave one look and then, "Jesus Christ!" she screamed, "shall I die for joy? Is it true? Is it true?" And she would have pulled the child to her in her ecstasy.

"Stop, stop! she is so hungry, the poor child! Leave her a little yet," said Ursula, pushing her gently away.

Barbara clapped her hands like a mad thing. "Oh, Uschi, what a friend you are, what a friend you are!" she cried.

"Yes, that is true," chimed in Domenika. "But how about our little Hami?"

"Yes, of course, how about little Hami?" repeated Barbara more soberly, but with eyes still on her child.

“The Meiteli¹ does not rob him,” said Ursula. “He is very strong, and already takes cows’ milk like an angel once a day, and should take bread before long.”

“Well, this is a fortunate thing for Meiteli,” said Domenika; “only I hope our Hami will not suffer by it.”

Here Barbara began to shed tears afresh and to say weakly, “Yes, yes,—little Hami,—that’ll be the next misery. Oh dear! oh dear! what a cruel world it is!”

Ursula glanced a little sternly at Domenika, and then leaning over Barbara and looking into her face with her young, starry eyes, she said very earnestly, “Dear Babeli, I am not robbing my little son. I tell you truthfully that had God sent me two babes at a birth, He could not have given me more milk than now I have.”

Barbara looked up at her and began to laugh, partly at the earnestness of her manner, and partly because the inrushing joy

¹ Little maid.

had swept away all her sense. "How pretty you are, Uschi!" she said. "I never knew you had such beautiful eyes before. You are so old and so young! I could kiss you all over and slave all my life for you for this, you good little woman, you!"

Her eyes glittered so brightly, and there were such red spots on her cheeks, that Ursula said, "Hush! Babeli, hush! you 'll make yourself ill with talking so much."

"Oh, no, no! joy never made any one ill yet," chattered the other. "It does me good to talk when I 've done nothing but cry for days and nights. And besides, I 've just got a capital thought! Look you, Ursula, your Hami shall grow up and wed my Meiteli," she said, with a high laugh that ended in weeping. She went on, sobbing and laughing the words by turns. "And they must wed before they grow too old, or how shall you and I dance at their wedding? Ah! how I thank God for his mercy!" Then she could stop neither her laughter

nor crying, but fairly screamed with one and wailed with the other, and cast herself from side to side in the bed, so that Domenika had to slap her hands very hard and even sprinkle cold water in her face.

“ Oh ! I know it’s horrible, behaving like this,” she gasped ; “ but I can’t leave off. Oh ! oh ! oh ! I shall split my sides.”

Domenika spoke very sharply to her. Ursula, sitting on the bed, could feel it shaken with the tyranny of this unwelcome laughter. It was strange and unnatural, and she hardly knew how to bear the sound, for, now that her fears for the child were at an end, she could not forget the dead man in the next room. She got up at last and shut the door very quietly as if some one were asleep in there.

That broke the spell upon the half-crazy woman. She drew a great shuddering breath, and became suddenly quiet. “ My poor man ! ” she said ; “ my poor, kind Andres ! ” and so passed into quiet and

rightful tears. Then Ursula laid the baby, now fast asleep, in her mother's arms. "She will sleep well now, and you too very soon, Babeli," she said in her kind way. "And I will come to her again when she needs me." And with that she left the poor woman, who was almost too weary to speak her thanks again.

Domenika followed her, and as they passed through the death chamber, "Will you see him?" the old woman asked. "He looks very well, does poor Luzi." When she turned the sheet back, the tears sprang to Ursula's eyes at sight of the miracle death had wrought with the homely round face she knew so well; it was full of a sort of stern peace and dignity. "He was a kind man if he was nothing else," said Domenika, and she snuffed his death-candle with finger and thumb, — "just as though it were any ordinary candle," thought Ursula.

Domenika was one of those who are wise from sheer goodness of heart. She knew

many secrets and repeated none ; she helped many sorrows and meddled with none. She knew all about the early love-story of Christian and Barbara ; she had seen something of Barbara's flighty behavior with Christian and with others since her marriage ; and knowing as she did how hot and how faithful a heart was Ursula's, and how stupidly a good man may blunder at times, she had sometimes feared and foreseen possible trouble. But Ursula had never spoken of the matter to Domenika or any one else, and Domenika saw no use in warning Ursula. Christian and his wife were such good, sensible people, that if trouble arose between them, God would end it or mend it before very long, she knew. In the misty dawn she stood in the doorway looking down at Ursula, with eyes full of praise.

“ How tired you look, little mother ! ” said Ursula. “ You too will be glad of some sleep now.”

“ Ay, ay,” said Domenika, hands on

hips and nodding. "But there 's something better than sleep, and that 's kindness ; and that 's what I 've seen this night."

Ursula's face grew very red and she hung her head a little.

"It 's done my heart good like wine,— better than wine," the old woman continued.

"Oh, well!" said Ursula, shaking her head a little impatiently ; "why did n't I think of it earlier ? I was nearly too late, Menga."

"Nonsense ! you 'll never be too late — never *quite* too late when the right thing 's got to be done, Uschi."

Ursula had always been one to keep her trouble well within doors, and was shy of asking help of any one save her Creator or her husband ; but now her trouble was bound up with her sin and clamored for utterance : for sound hearts always know, hate, and long to confess their guilt in the presence of praise. She sighed and stared up at the little window yellow with candle-

light in the gray dawn, and felt she must tell this friend what wicked thoughts she had had about her husband and her neighbor that night, and how sorely she longed to make peace with Christian, could she but find the way.

But just as she opened her mouth to speak, a faint, fretful voice from the inner room cried, "Menga, Menga, where are you all this while?" And so the confession was not spoken.

"I 'm coming!" called back Domenika. She leaned forward from the step and looked right into her companion's eyes; then she gave her a hearty slap on the shoulder which meant more than many a kiss. "There, get along home with you! You 're a good woman, Uschi," she said; and so they parted.

When she was back in her home, Ursula, who was a practical as well as a generous woman, began to consider the task she had taken upon herself, that of sharing her

bounteous motherhood between little Hami and the child of this helpless woman. She could manage well, she concluded, if she carefully planned her time, and tried not to work too hard. Thank God, she was strong and had plenty of good food nowadays.

“Now, who could have thought,” pondered Ursula, as she got into bed in the clearing dawn,—she who rose before dawn as a rule,—“that that poor Barbara, whom I always thought so flighty, could love her baby so much! And who would have thought that I could love Barbara! Well, it only shows you can’t know a person till you begin to love them; and you can’t love a person till you begin to do something for them.” With that newly found wisdom in her mind,—and it is one that the wisest are often slow enough in finding and believing,—she fell wearily and happily asleep beside her children.

CHAPTER VII

URSULA, THE BREAD-MAKER

URSULA awoke from her three hours' sleep feeling so light-hearted that at first she thought things must have righted themselves between Christian and herself ; and when she came wide awake, and remembered she was light-hearted only because she had done Barbara a friendly service over night, she was hardly less happy, knowing that with the first step on the right road the end is already in sight. There was a full day before her, and two hungry babies, and she must hurry if she would find time to sit with Barbara while the neighbors were carrying Andres' body away to Davos. But for all that, her happiness could not keep within the limits of her daily work. It overflowed, not only in the pleasantest looks and words, but in cer-

tain extra and unnecessary tasks, which no sooner suggested themselves to her than she set about doing them, in a manner most unusual in this methodical housewife. For instance, she was still scrubbing her milk-vessels, when she remembered the waistcoat that had been so long a-making for Peter. There and then she dried her hands and left the pails standing while she sought for needle and thread. While she was sewing on its last button she was planning a treat for the little ones ; and, having encased the delighted Peter in the strong stiff garment (made very large to allow for growth), she began to make a *Schnitzbrod*, a cake which seldom appeared on the table except on birthdays or at Christmas-time. It was no common *Schnitzbrod* either : never before had she been so generous with the fruit. “ Nobody shall say, ‘ It’s only a brother,’¹

¹ In Graubünden, people say of a cake, if the cook has been stingy with the fruit, “ It is only a brother,” meaning it is not the thing they took it for. If it is *very* poor, they say, “ It is only a cousin.”

this time!" she said laughingly to Deteli as they carried it to the oven. "I have only once made such a *Schnitzbrod* as this, and that was on father's birthday." In her heart she wished he were there to share it.

About ten o'clock Domenika came in breathless. "They've come to fetch Andres away," she said. Ursula left everything, and went to Barbara, and sat holding her hand while Prader and Fopp were carrying the coffin out. When the shuffling feet were gone, and the cart began slowly to move, Barbara asked her friend to raise her in bed so that she could see the funeral through the window. She watched in silence, trying vainly to distinguish the cart and its burden through her blinding tears. "I could n't see anything, after all," she said at last, when the little procession had rounded the turn of the road; "but I knew he was there." Ursula threw her arms about her, and cried herself with all her heart.

When Domenika came in from watching the funeral out of sight, Ursula ran over to her home and brought back Meiteli sleeping on her cushion, and Hami sitting up in his rough little handcart, cooing and rosy from sleep. "Here's company!" she cried, bringing them through the sunny doorway into the shaded room. "And don't they look healthy and happy? You may think Hami looks a great deal stronger, but the Meiteli will soon be just as strong. For one thing, she takes her food like a hungry little angel; and for another, I'm going to give her a present. Do you know what?"

Barbara shook her head languidly, and tried to smile.

"You'll never guess, and perhaps you won't think much of it when I tell you; but you ask Domenika about it! Well, it's Deteli's Ascension-Day garland. We kept it for Hami, but he does n't want it,— the strong little rogue! He never has croup,

nor convulsions, nor any one of these things, so she 's more than welcome to it. You ask Menga if it is n't a good thing to have in the house ! ”

“ There 's nothing like it,” said Domenika, shaking her head ; “ and I 'd say it to any doctor you 'd face me with.”

Domenika was indeed a storehouse of wisdom for her younger neighbors. She was seldom at a loss for a recipe or a remedy, for where her science ended her magic began. She knew the healing value of all the plants in Graubünden ; she could bring a child through its teething troubles without so much as looking at a doctor ; she could bewitch headache, toothache, and rheumatism, and charm away warts ; and she believed — as her mother and grandmother believed before her — that the yellow water-flowers, gathered just after sunrise and worn in a garland upon the head of a sinless maid child in church on Ascension Sunday, possessed magical preventive

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and healing properties the whole year through. However dry and dusty it became hanging on the cottage wall, the wreath would prevent or check convulsions or any other sudden seizure in an infant if laid upon its breast from time to time, or if placed beneath its pillow. "I don't pretend to explain it,—I don't understand it," Domenika said, when Ursula first questioned her on the subject; "but it's true as life and death. It is n't against religion, I'm certain; but I would n't ask the Herr Pfarrer about it, if I was you, for he would n't understand any better than I do, and he would n't believe in it either: so where's the use?"

So, about noon, when her own house was all in order, Ursula came in again bearing two gifts,—a big piece of *Schnitzbrod* on a plate, and the little dried garland slung on her arm. "I've always carried it wherever I've carried Hami," she said; "but he's never needed it, so it's as good as ever it was."

Barbara had no heart to smile at this simplicity ; she could only be grateful for the kindness.

Meantime the children were like birds and flowers in their mother's sunshine. They sang, laughed, and blossomed with happiness ; and, as Peter and Deteli climbed to the higher pastures with the cattle, the little boy said, " How good it is, now that mother is just like what she used to be before father and she got so angry together that time ! " And Deteli answered, " Yes ; and fancy making a *Schnitzbrod* ! "

When Deteli grew tired and hot with running about, she sat down beside her brother and begged him to tell her stories. Peter carried a good many in his memory, but there were two which his little sister loved better than any others. One was the sad history of a cow who died of a broken heart : this she loved because it made her delightfully miserable. The other was the merry and fearsome tale of the Wildmännli

who leaped out of the woods and caught and strangled naughty boys: this she loved because it frightened her deliciously.

“Well, then,” said Peter, for about the twentieth time in his short life, “it was like this. Father says it was a great herd of cattle that went up into the high pastures. They were all beautiful, all strong, all good milkers. And when they came to the high meadows, the two strongest of all, called Fleck and Bärli”¹ —

“Just like our Fleck and our Bärli over there?” was the invariable interruption at this point.

“Yes, just like ours. Well, they set to work to fight to see who was going to be Heer-Kuh.² They began to fight just as the sun rose, and the one seemed just as strong as the other, till the sun set, and then poor Fleck was beaten down on her knees, with

¹ Fleck = Spot. Bärli = Little Bear.

² Heer-Kuh: Difficult to translate, but meaning “Leader.”

a broken horn, and blood running from several most horrible scratches. Yes, it was horrible,—blood, blood, all over the place, and dripping on the ground. Well, then the Senn,¹ and he was called Flury” —

“Just like Flury who brought us in his cart?”

“Yes, just like him. The Senn knew that Bärli was the leader cow, so he came and hung the great bell on her collar. And she was proud as a queen, and happy and kind as a good fairy; and she was a good leader, and they all loved and followed her, and she was quite good friends with poor Fleck, too. No, there never was such a proud and happy Heer-Kuh as Bärli in all the Alps.” The story-teller paused. He always paused here a little, because the rest was quite another chapter. Besides, Deteli, with sinking heart, always fixed him with anxious eyes at this point, and asked, “But

¹ Senn = farmer. The little hill-farm is called a *Sennerei*.

she was n't always Heer-Kuh forever, was she, poor Bärli ? ”

“ Oh, no,” replied Peter, shaking his head ; “ that 's just it. Well, the next year, after being all the winter in stall, they went up to the Alps again, and Bärli, proud as ever, led the way. But when they came up into the high meadows, there was going to be a great fight to see who would be leader cow, and the Senn was ready to bet all that he had that Bärli would be leader again. Now there was a young cow called Bruni ” —

“ We used to have a Bruni, only she died,” said the little girl, turning her head to look at their cows, which were quietly feeding above them, and surprised as ever at these remarkable coincidences.

“ Why, so we did ! Well, Bruni had just had her first calf ; she was only a heifer the year before, and nobody thought she was anything particular ; but now she came forward to fight with Bärli. They began to

fight as the sun rose, and they went on fighting till the sun set; and then they stopped because they could n't see. But they began again next morning, and went on all day long, and then, just as the sun set on the second day, poor Bärli, although she had not one scratch on all her beautiful skin, was so tired that she fell over and lay like a dead thing; and Bruni threw up her head, and bellowed with joy, because she knew she was Heer-Kuh now. The Senn heard her, and came running to where they were, and he kneeled down beside Bärli and cried, 'Oh, Bärli, Bärli! thou art beaten, and thou art no longer Heer-Kuh, poor Bärli!' And he unbuckled the great bell from Bärli's neck, and hung it on Bruni's neck instead. Then Bärli, who was once so happy and proud, and although she had n't one scratch on all her body, lay there and died of a broken heart. Yes, that was the end of it."

Little Deteli could not hear the story often

enough ; but she always shed tears when they came to the end. To-day she said, “ I wish — I *wish* Bärli did n’t *quite* die.”

“ You would n’t like the story half so much if she did n’t,” said Peterli.

“ Yes, I should,” said Deteli, still sniffing over Bärli’s pathetic fate ; adding a minute later, slowly and wonderingly, “ No, I don’t think I should. Please tell me about Wildmännli.”

This story was one which in Peter’s hands grew in horror with every telling. At first the Wildmännli only ran out of the dark wood after the little boy and tried to strangle him. Later on he fell plump off the bough of a tree on to his shoulders, and so got a horrid grip of his victim with both arms and legs. Later still he pulled the naughty boy’s hairs out, one by one, and bit his ears till the blood ran ; and, really, latterly the Wildmännli’s conduct had become so outrageous that his chronicler could hardly bear to mention him ; and one evening, as

he was putting Deteli (who clamored all the while for this fascinating story) to bed, he said hastily, glancing over his shoulder, “No, it’s getting too late to tell that story, Deteli; it’s a nice story for telling in the sunshine.”

This morning the sun shone so brightly, the flowers and blue sky looked so kind and harmless, the cows so homely, and their bells sounded so cheerful, and there was such a long time before it would grow dark, that Peter began the story fearlessly, and added several new terrors, one describing how the Wildmännli stole a lovely *Schnitzbrod* from a little girl called Deteli. But when his little sister broke in apprehensively, “No, no, not Deteli!” he fortunately remembered the name of the girl was Tina.

CHAPTER VIII

A MESSAGE AND ITS ANSWER

WHEN the children brought the cows home for milking in the peaceful afternoon, their mother welcomed them with happy face and greeting ; and later, when Klasje came to fetch the milk, she had a message for him to take to Christian, because, as she said to herself, “Christian shall see I want to be friends with him.”

“If you should happen to meet Christian,” she said, “tell him we are all quite well, and the pasture is beautiful.”

Klasje was hardly the most desirable messenger in the world. He was rather deaf, exceedingly dull, and when he spoke he had to bring his words out as best he could (through a mouthful of plums, as it always seemed to Peter), so that the chances were he did not hear you aright, might not un-

derstand if he did, nor deliver his message intelligibly at the other end. However, his intentions were excellent, and Christian knew the poor lad's speech by now, so Ursula trusted him with her message, giving it loudly and slowly, twice over. "Be sure you remember it," she said.

"Klasje remembers, never fear," he replied, with a sort of pride.

"I hope you will," she said again so earnestly that he shook himself like a pettish child.

"Well, well, Klasje, I meant no harm," she said kindly. But even after that she ran after him as he passed by later with his cart. "Don't you forget, Klasje," she said.

He turned and looked at her reproachfully with his goggle eyes. "Am I a fool, then, Frau Valär?" he said. And Klasje was not the only one who has confidently put this awkward question to his neighbors.

The next day Ursula asked him eagerly: "Well, and what did Christian say?"

"Oh, I could n't see him ; he was n't anywhere about."

The day after she said, "I suppose you did n't see Christian yesterday?"

"No ; I asked for him, but he was out driving all day long."

That same afternoon she was washing clothes with Domenika in the trough below the spring. Domenika had heard ill news, and, although she hated meddling as she hated sin, her heart burned within her until she uttered her few words of warning.

"I was talking to Flury Gadmer this morning," she said. "He saw Christe last night."

Ursula wanted to ask a great many questions, but she only rubbed the thing she was washing more vigorously, and said, "Well?"

"He saw him at the inn."

"Oh, yes. I hoped he would go there for a supper sometimes," said Ursula quickly.

Then there was a little pause, filled only by the sound of the running water and the

rubbing and rinsing, till Domenika went on, “There be better ways of growing rich than by staying away from the pastures and hard work, and driving gentlefolk in a carriage.”

“Christian knows how to manage his affairs as well as any man in the valley,” said his wife.

But the other continued, as if she had not heard this interruption, “Much better ways to my thinking, and one way is by living sober.”

Ursula turned a hot and anxious face to her companion, and opened her mouth sharply to ask her what she meant. But she closed it without speaking. If her husband were behaving ill — and it was not likely in a man that had lived soberly for ten years — she would learn it from himself, and from no one else in the world. And even then there might be something to explain it, and that was her own wrong-doing. A few days ago, outside Barbara’s hut in

the dawn, she had nearly opened her heart to Domenika ; but the ripe moment had fallen unused, and now she was far too startled and bewildered for confession. "I don't know what you mean," she said stoutly, adding incomprehensibly, "There 's two sides to everything, after all ! "

Domenika knew by the look of her face it was useless to say any more on that subject.

Ursula went about for the rest of that day with the old woman's words ringing like alarm bells in her head, and a whole crop of questions gathering to the sound of them. She was almost sick with desire to go straight to her husband in Davos, and prove the report to be the lie she believed it, or, finding it true, do all that a wife could do, to shame him within doors and shield him without, until such time as his proper sober spirit returned to him. But she knew she must stay and feed the two babies and tend the cattle, or what would

become of Barbara and the livelihood of her own children? The next best thing to going herself was to send Peter, for she knew Christian would lose his right hand rather than disgrace himself in the eyes of his son. But although she thought she did not believe the report, she could not bring herself to send the little fellow without first telling his father; and finally made up her mind to wait till the following day. "If Christe sends me a kind message by Klasje," she thought, "I will send back word that Peter is coming to keep him company."

Next day, for all her anxiety, she asked Klasje nothing at all, but waited, hoping he would remember if he had news to tell. He had already gone a little way up the road, when he turned and came trudging back. "Oh, Frau Valär," he said, "I saw your husband yesterday, and I gave him your message; so I *don't* forget, you see, after all!"

"Well," said Ursula, whose heart beat so

thick and fast she could hardly speak,
“what did he say?”

“Let me see. Oh, yes ! he said he knew
the pasture was beautiful.”

“He did n’t say anything else, I suppose ?
Not that there was anything important for
him to say.”

“No ; that’s all.”

“Thank you, *Klasje*.” And she went
back through the sunshine, that was now no
brighter than cloud or rain, to the work
which had suddenly grown heavy and dull.
The children seemed noisier than she had
ever known them before, and when she gave
the babies their supper, she wondered how
long her strength would last for feeding
both. Her heart was hard without and sore
within.

CHAPTER IX

URSULA'S PEACE-OFFERINGS

IT is strange what terrible blunders some folk, who are affectionate and peace-loving, but neither quick of temper nor wit, will commit when anger moves them at last. Christian was one of those slow people who, when at last they begin to understand, are apt to go too fast and overshoot the mark. When he realized that Ursula was jealous of Barbara, he began to wonder if every difference they had ever had had been due to this, and he soon fumed himself into the certainty that it had, and that she had really distrusted him at times. His mother's proverbs came like angry wasps about him. "Better have the devil in bed and by board than jealousy," she had often quoted; and, "Open the door to suspicion and peace flies out of the window." Under his quiet bear-

ing, Christian was possessed by fear for the happiness of his home, and wrath at the insult offered his long good faith. He would not see his wife if he could help it ; certainly he would not discuss with her nor explain, for if these ten years had not convinced her of his faithfulness, no argument would. But he would act, and act promptly, or the evil would grow apace ; for Barbara would still be their neighbor, and he — though he heartily wished she were in America with her brother ! — must still act neighborly by her from time to time, and Ursula would say he was wishing her and the children dead for that ! There was only one thing to do : to punish her in such a way as to make her see what a peace-breaker and sin-breeder jealousy was, until she, strong proud woman as she was, would confess her folly and ask him to forgive her.

With what he persuaded himself was a clear conscience (as though such a thing

could house in the same soul as an unforgiving heart !), he set about his task.

Many a man in like case would have said, “ If she suspects me of going after other women, she shall have some reason for it ! ” But little Hami himself was not less likely to think of such a thing than Christian,— it never came into his head ; and, not being a man who could see one thing in two ways, he welcomed and doggedly followed the first idea that came to him, convinced that here was the way of teaching his wife her lesson quickly, and in a fashion to last her life. With the same deliberation with which, ten years before, he had given up drink for the love of Ursula, he went back to it now ; not because he must, for such a vice takes no easy or masterful hold on men like him, but because he would. He was no drunkard, nor had ever been one, at his worst, and not for the sake of teaching his wife a thousand lessons, he thought, would he make a beast or a fool of himself now. He could

drink deep without losing his head or the use of his legs ; but not without wasting money, and rousing the rough, quarreling spirit that slept sound enough so long as he remained temperate. Klasje, and the others who went to and fro, would carry the report of his doings to Ursula ; she would know well enough where the blame should lie, and come to her senses the sooner for such ill tidings.

He had now spent two unprofitable evenings at the inn, but without any result beyond a headache. There came no protest, no appeal, from Sertig. A third evening he stayed at home mending his harness, and brooding all the while over the thought that he had set his neighbors wondering and made no impression on the culprit ; and so when Klasje put his head inside the door and gave him Ursula's cheerful message, Christian would as soon have had none at all.

“ Your wife bade me say that she and

the little ones were well, and the pasture beautiful," said Klasje, careful to repeat the exact words.

Christian pondered the sentence. "'And we are all getting on well enough without you, my dear,' — that's what she means, I suppose!" he thought bitterly.

"What shall I tell your wife?" asked the lad, looking back to see that his horse was standing.

"Oh, I knew that the pasture would be good, — you can tell her that, Klasje," he said. "The pasture beautiful, indeed!" he muttered to himself when Klasje was gone, trying to cover his disappointment with scornfulness. The next evening he was back at the inn, enduring his own misconduct as best he might, and awaiting in desperate patience some sign or message from Sertig.

It is a wise proverb which says that although you can fight the devil anywhere, no man ever played with him outside hell.

Christian persuaded himself that he was only pretending to be wicked,—that he stood his ground well; but his foot was already further within the black gate than he knew. He began to look to the drink to help him to forget his fear and hurt, and to give him what little cheer he knew. As a consequence, he awoke late in the mornings, and found fault with everything,—the lateness of the hour, the weather, the chair he stumbled against, the coffee he burnt, and, worst of all, the wife whose stupid suspicion had driven him into such dismal, unthrifty habits.

It is one thing, when at a safe distance, to wish to frighten your wife into repentance by report of your reckless living, and quite another to follow close on the heels of that report in person; and the morning on which his English gentlefolk bade him drive them out to Sertig Dörfli, Christian could almost have lamed his horses rather than take them thither. He could

not afford to lose the work, however, so they set out.

“I was in Sertig about five years ago, Valär,” said the faded, sad-looking lady with the young husband, “and have often longed to see it again. I have always thought that no one could be ill, or wicked, or wretched there.”

“The place is well enough,” said Christian, nodding. “The pasture is beautiful this season, they tell me.” A moment later he added grimly, “But you can’t judge by looks, my lady. A man died there in a fit a few days back, — Andres Luzi by name ; and he was a rich man, too.”

Beyond that he had but little to tell his gentlefolk to-day, so that the lady, who had already written several entries in her journal describing her typical fine Graubündener peasant with his “quaint sayings” and “courteous independence,” now contemplated adding a line or two on the subject of taciturnity. To-day he neither

talked to his travelers nor chirruped to his horses ; he could think of nothing but that he was driving full speed towards the very person from whom he had meant to stay away till she should come running back to him, and clamor for forgiveness. He set his teeth, and cracked his whip, and swore that unless she sought him out to ask his pardon, he would not speak to his wife to-day ; and, lest sight or news of her should change his mind, he made his heart hard and safe by reminding himself that she stood between him and his children, whom he longed to see.

It was neither so hard nor so safe as he thought ; for when the gorge was passed, and the fir-trees left behind, he found himself wanting to see Ursula, just as he used to when he was courting, and hoping she would come to her senses to-day. "Well, it all rests with her," he said to himself. "She has only to come and take back her words and beg my pardon. It 's simple enough."

Christian did not speak English, but he had not driven English people about for so long without discovering certain infallible clues to the subjects of their conversations among themselves. If they said "picturesque," they were speaking of the country people; if "quaint," of the houses; if "nice," of their compatriots; if "glorious," of mountains; if "intelligent," of himself, and so on. To-day, when they were entering the village, and the lady said to her husband, "Oh, what a picturesque figure!" Christian knew that she spoke of a woman standing by the spring, and the stale phrase was sweet in his ear. Turning round on his box, "That's my wife over there, my lady," he said with a sudden warmth at his heart, "Ursula Valär."

Ursula, who was alone washing at the wooden trough below the spring, heard the quick trotting and jingling bells, and knew them both from afar. She looked up and saw Christian approaching. He knew he

was recognized, and his heart suddenly outran his horses in coming up with his wife.

“If she only so much as nods at me, I believe I shall begin to forgive her,” he thought; “and if she smiles, I believe I shall jump down and hug her there before the gentlefolk!”

“If he makes a sign to me, or calls me ever so softly, I shall know all’s well. I hope I shan’t cry for joy!” thought Ursula.

The horses were nearing rapidly; they were close upon her; and now they were passing by. Her heart beat, her knees knocked, her face flamed. How could she wave a hand when she must hold on to the side of the trough for fear of falling? And how should she raise her face to his when it was all afire, quivering, foolish with hope and fear? She was on the further side of the trough from the road, but she could not look up; she kept her head bent low as the carriage rattled past. “Grüesse!” said the English lady prettily, looking back at her.

“ Grüesse ! ” answered Ursula faintly, raising her head.

She could look up now. She saw the carriage stop before the inn, saw the people get out, and Christian busy unharnessing his horses. He never once looked back to where she was standing.

There is no doubt that quarreling not only makes good people bad, but sensible people stupid, as well. They will come within less than a finger’s length of understanding and peace, and just miss each other again. Thus it was now. Ursula did not know that she had appeared to be unwilling to look at Christian. She thought he would surely understand her sudden happy surprise and shyness ; and she stood looking and longing in vain for some sign from him. When he disappeared through the door of the *Stube*, she went on with her washing, then wrung the things dry enough for carrying, and trudged homewards with her heavy basketful.

At the sight of her *Schnitzbrod* lying upon her table, a little hope opened like a flower in her wintry heart. She cut the loaf in two, wrapped the larger piece in a clean white cloth, and hurried away with it towards the inn. The carriage stood unhorsed beside the road, the lady and gentleman were eating their lunch upon the balcony ; and from the *Stube* came a great noise of laughter and talk, and the clinking of glasses. She thought the lady was looking at her, so she could not do at once what she came to do, but feeling very deceitful, she passed the inn. Then, when a backward glance showed her that the visitors had gone within doors, she returned to the carriage, laid her burden on the driver's seat, and hurried home as fast as she could.

The greater part of her business was still to do. After feeding the babies, she left them in Domenika's keeping, and set out to find Peter. He and Deteli, carrying their midday meal in a handkerchief, had followed

the cattle to the upper pastures in company with little Toni Buol. The latter had brought two of his father's whips with him, and there was now going forward a mighty cracking of whips, each boy trying his best to wake the louder echo in the surrounding hills. Peter was very proud of himself; to-day for the first time he had caught the trick, and now, with his swinging curve to the right, curve to the left, straight up, straight down, crack! — you had a noise that really split your ears, and might have started a dozen avalanches. As his mother came up the hill, he cracked louder and louder still, although he assured her he had done far better than that before she came within earshot.

“ Yes, yes, I can well believe it, Peterli,” she said, wiping the sweat from her face. “ But now if you have eaten your dinner, run home quick. Your father has brought gentlefolk to the inn, and starts back before long. Go and put on your Sunday clothes,

and the new waistcoat I 've just finished, and run to the inn before he starts. Ask if the gentlefolk will allow you to ride beside him. Be sure you show him that you have your best clothes on ; and a nice clean face, mind ! ”

“ But why must I go ? ” asked Peter, dismally surprised.

“ If your father asks you that, say, ‘ Because mother thinks you 'll like me for company at home for a little, and I can help you.’ Just that.”

“ I don 't want to go,” began Peter. He was ashamed to cry before Toni, or he could have roared with disappointment.

“ Don 't want ! don 't want ! ” exclaimed Ursula. “ Come, come, Peter ; perhaps the father will only keep you a few days ; perhaps he will take you to Oberammergau ! And see ! you may cut yourself a nice slice of *Schnitzbrod* and take it in your pocket. Now go along, there 's my Peterli ; and take good care of the father. I 'll bring the beasts down by and by.”

Peter did not budge, but scowled and kicked the turf with his heel.

“Is it then pleasanter to go for beating than asking ?” asked Ursula sternly.

Peter gave a sharp, savage crack with the whip, flung it down, and began to scramble down the hill.

“Good-by, Peterli !” called Ursula after him.

He made no reply, and never looked round. Was every one going away from her without words, without looks even ? She turned with strange yearning to little Deteli. “Are you glad to have little mother all to yourself ?” she said.

But Deteli was whimpering for her playfellows ; for Toni had followed Peter. “Come, now !” said Ursula ; “I was just thinking I might tell you that story all about Bruni the Heer-Kuh, if you were a good little maid.”

“Bärli, not Bruni,” sniffed Deteli, visibly cheering.

“ Well, Bärli, then. Come, we ’ll sit here till it ’s time for the milking.” She felt grateful to the child when she nestled close to her for the story-telling.

CHAPTER X

THE PEACE-OFFERINGS ARE REJECTED

PETER did not dare to disobey his mother, but the hot rebel heart in him brought him up to the very verge of disobedience. Instead of hurrying, as she had bidden him, he changed his clothes as leisurely as might be, and then strolled down to the inn just as his father was putting his horses in.

“How now, Peter!” said Christian, staring at the child in his Sunday clothes. Christian had had a good dinner, and his face was rather red. “You look as fine as a wedding.”

“Mother told me to come here and go back with you,” said Peter.

“Why, in God’s name?” asked the other, busy with a buckle of the harness, and not looking at him.

“Because she thinks you want company,” said Peter sullenly.

“Well, *you’re* not the cheerfulest company, by the look of you!” said Christian. “And she wants me to drive you along with the gentlefolk? It’s out of the question.”

Peter was so astonished by these last words that they quite shook him out of his sulkiness. Why was it out of the question to suppose the gentlefolk would allow him, in his best clothes,—and with such a fine waistcoat too,—to travel with them? He said nothing, but he looked down at the stiff little garments with vague misgiving, and as if he saw them for the first time. And now the English people were coming down from the balcony.

“Run away, Peterli,” said his father quickly; “and see here,” giving him the *Schnitzbrod*, “take that back with you.”

Peter put up his hands for the parcel. “Mother thought you’d be glad of company,” he repeated half-heartedly.

There were two neighbors standing at the door of the *Stube*, and Anneli the smiling serving-maid.

“Oh !” said Christian, more for them than for the child, “she need n’t fret about that: there’s no lack of company in the town.” He cracked his whip, chirruped to his horses, waved his hat to Anneli, and they were off.

Peter stood looking after them, trying to assure himself he had said all that his mother had told him to say, and that, if his father would not take him, it was not his fault. He had not mentioned his clean face, it is true ; but that should have spoken for itself. He certainly ought to go and tell his mother of his ill-success ; but he felt shy of meeting her, and determined to put it off a little. So he was now free to continue his whip-cracking, and sought out Toni with this in his mind. But somehow he now found whip-cracking the dullest game in the world, soon gave it up, and

hung about in his stiff clothes with no heart in him for anything at all.

Meantime, up on the sweet hillside, Ursula thought of Peter and the *Schnitzbrod*, and began to feel quite hopeful about her two peace-offerings. When she took the beasts home for milking, she was full of the quiet promise of happiness.

But on entering the hut, the first thing she saw was her gift-cake lying on the table, with its clean white wrapper half open. She stood still so suddenly that little Deteli, whom she was leading by the hand, looked up quite startled.

“It’s nothing, dearie,” she said, and set about getting the evening meal ready.

“Christe is a hard man when he’s angry,” she said to herself. “Hard, hard, hard !”

A little later, Peter sauntered up to the door, hands in pockets, looking part foolish, part defiant. Hunger told him the time of day and brought him home, though

he looked for a scolding, and deserved it too. As he neared the hut, he saw his mother coming up from the meadow, carrying the clean clothes that had been spread there for drying. "Peter! You!" she exclaimed at sight of him.

"It was n't my fault," he said quickly. "Father would n't have me."

Her face flushed crimson, and she set her basket down on the step for a moment; then she took it up again, and went into the *Stube*, and Peter followed her.

"Take your supper, Peterli," she said; "you can have a slice of *Schnitzbrod* along with Deteli, if you like," and she busied herself with the clean clothes. There were a good many of these, and she smoothed them out with her hand and folded them so carefully that it was quite a long time before they were all laid in the coffer; and meantime Peter was waiting for his scolding. He took two bites at his *Schnitzbrod*, then left it, and sat watching his mother

and softly kicking the leg of his chair. At last he said with difficulty, "Why don't you say something?"

She turned and looked at him with the saddest eyes he had ever seen. "Because, if you did your best, I have nothing more to say, Peterli; and even if I had, I ought n't to spare time to say it." And she went out to give Meiteli her supper.

Women like this, however wretched they be, will sometimes pass from task to task, and literally find no time for tears the whole day long; and at night their bodies are so tired that sleep comes down too soon and too deep to allow for weeping.

After Ursula had put the little ones to bed, she looked about for Peter; but seeing him nowhere, she concluded he was playing with Toni. Then she went back to Barbara, because she had promised Domenika to bear her company while she was busy elsewhere. She lit no candle when she went home at last, but got into bed

in the dark. There she lay, too wretched and stony for tears or prayers ; and over and over again she said to herself, "Just as he put my bread out of his carriage, so he would put me out of his life. Just as he sent the child away, so he would send me away. It has come to that." She thought of the unhappy women she had known. One, Marie Gredi, drowned herself when her sweetheart married another girl in America ; and yet Marie was an honest, religious girl. At that time happy Ursula had wondered how any woman who was good like Marie, and had no shame to hide, could do away with her own life ; but now hapless Ursula understood. "But I can't find peace that way," she cried in her heart, "because I'm a mother, because of the little ones, because of my dear, dear children !"

All the afternoon her hope had been growing and strengthening, but the sight of her rejected peace-offering had stricken

it instantly dead. From that moment her heart had felt like a cold black cup, ever filling and filling with misery ; and now, at the thought of her little ones, it suddenly brimmed and overflowed, and the storm broke loose from body and soul in tears. When it was over, her limbs were heavy and weak, thought drifted away like a little cloud, for very weariness she could not remember her grief ; and then the mercy of God came down in sleep. She lay as utterly still and forgetful as the dead.

CHAPTER XI

PETERLI GOES A-PEACEMAKING

LOVE, who is eternally mending when he is not making, was busy all this time in spite of all the wrong-doing, the cross purposes, and mistakes ; and now, because grown people blundered and failed in his service so foolishly, a little child became his agent.

When Peter found his mother was neither going to scold nor punish him, the little boy's heart grew uncomfortably full. As he sat at table trying to eat his *Schnitzbrod*, which, for all its fruit, was dry and tasteless in his mouth, he saw the whole truth about his behavior as plainly as he saw the table,—or would have seen it, had it not been for something that blurred his sight. He knew he had not tried to coax his father to take him with him to Davos, although his mother desired it so earnestly, simply be-

cause he wanted to stop at Sertig and have a good time with Toni Buol. He could see his mother was dreadfully disappointed, and as for himself, he was sick of everything, and cared no more for Toni and his whip than for the man in the moon. For a little while after Ursula went away to Meiteli he was more ashamed of himself and more wretched than he had ever been in his life. Then he began to know how dearly he loved his mother. He loved her better than he had ever loved her before. Indeed, he thought his heart must really burst with love for her; for it grew bigger and bigger, and pressed up into his throat in a manner so painful as to squeeze hot water out of his eyes. If Deteli had not been staring at him, he must certainly have put his head down on the table and cried. As it was, he was very near disgracing himself in this manner, when there suddenly came into his head an idea which dried his tears before they fell; jerked his heart down into its

proper place, and set it about its usual practical business. In a mighty hurry he swallowed the mouthful he had been turning over and over in his mouth, and shoved the rest of his slice across the table to Deteli. "Here, Stare-eyes," he said, "you can have that, if you like;" and he got down and began to take off his coat. "Don't you tell the little mother about this," he said, stopping in his toilet to raise a forbidding finger. "If you do, I 'll — I 'll — well, I tell you what! I 'll never tell you about the Heer-Kuh again as long as I live; so mind, Stare-eyes!"

Deteli nodded, because her mouth was too crammed to speak; and she watched him silently as he put on his old week-day clothes, and tied up his best things in his red cotton handkerchief. "Good-by," he said, kissing her round, red cheeks, rounder than ever with the cake inside. She began to look so distressed that he said with a warning tone, "Now don't cry, Deteli, or

you 'll choke with that stuff in your mouth. Besides," he added more awfully, " there 's a Wildmännli up in the hills there, who came down once upon a time and pinched a little girl's legs black and blue, and all because she told her mother just exactly what her brother was going to do. And the brother's name was Peterli, too ; so look out!"

He peeped cautiously across to the Luzis' hut, then ran down the steps, and scampered as hard as he could till the inn stood between him and his mother. He was going to tramp into Davos, and if he would arrive before nightfall, he must hurry. It was a long distance for a little boy, but that was not what he dreaded. He was brave enough about most things, — had no fear of climbing perilous rocks, rushing down the sheer snow-slopes on the hay bundles from the higher huts, or managing the beasts when they were wild and troublesome ; anything by daylight for Peter, —

anything you pleased! But twilight, deepening into night in that lonely valley, — that was full of terrors for him ; and one could measure his love for his mother by the fact that he faced it now.

Many a time during that long walk, Peter wished he had never told those stories about Wildmännli to Deteli, above all wished he had never invented that about dropping down on to the boy's shoulders from the boughs of trees. It was really horrible ; besides, that part was n't true, and yet he had made Deteli believe it. Peter began to think fairy tales were foolish, wicked things ; and seeing that any of us may be called upon at any time to walk under trees by twilight, it is certainly inadvisable to people them with imps ! At one moment he felt so uncomfortable that he began to say his *Vater Unser*. Feeling not one whit the better for that, he started jodeling, but that sounded so queer in the large, shadowy evening it frightened him more than the silence, and

made him fear lest he had waked up all manner of strange creatures who might otherwise have gone on sleeping harmlessly enough. After that, he fixed his thought upon his father, the good welcome he would give him, and the warm red wine ; for he would certainly behave just as he used to before he and his mother grew so angry with one another that time ; and then, too, his father would be so much obliged to his mother for sending him, after all, that he would make friends with her, and they would all be happy together again. This helped him over the ground so well, and kept him in such stout heart, that he did not notice how dark it was growing until he was nearing the end of his journey. When he became aware of night-fall, fear whipped and spurred his jaded strength ; and he stumbled through Clavadel as fast as spent breath and tired feet would let him.

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTIAN, THE WINE-DRINKER

MEANTIME Christian, little knowing what the night would bring him, was sitting in the *Stube* of the inn. He wanted to forget all about the visit to Sertig, but could find no better way of doing this than in telling himself over and over again that it was Ursula's fault they had not come to an understanding that day ; that had she wished to be friendly, she would certainly have sought him out and spoken to him ; that she had possibly, nay probably, put that *Schnitzbrod* in the carriage for Peter, and it was therefore only natural that he should send it back when he sent back the child. And so on, and so on, and so on. These things were much easier to believe in the inn than in his silent home, where they were apt to take to themselves a most contrary twist ; so to the

inn he went for such comfort as he might find, though it were only disagreeing with somebody about something.

The house which was now the inn had been the dwelling of one of the noble Graubündener families up to the end of the eighteenth century. The stone-paved *Stube* was large though low-pitched, and the arms of the family were carved on a beam in the ceiling, and painted on the tiles of the great stove. Christian, and perhaps half a dozen others, were gathered about the long centre table, their wine and newspapers before them. The room was cloudy with smoke, and noisy, as it always was when Berni,—a young Tyrolese horse-dealer, an excellent singer, and jolly and jaunty as one of his own songs,—happened to look in. At home or abroad, Berni was always popular, always king of his company; and a glum face in his court must look for small mercy from his glib tongue.

Christian, with his *Schoppen*¹ before him,

¹ Measure of wine.

and his "*Davoser Zeitung*" in his hand, took no more heed of Berni and his antics than of the smallest fly on the window-pane, until Berni, who demanded attention as greedily as any vain woman, began to question him pointedly on matters of local interest. Christian gave the shortest of answers, but the shorter they were the further the daring fellow went out to meet them, till at last he was openly bantering him. "Why, Christe!" he ventured to say, winking at his neighbors, "it's like old times to-night: you're quite like a bachelor again, with all your jolly bachelor do-what-I-damn-please ways about you; ain't you now?"

For a moment there was silence, save for the sound of some one spitting and then rubbing the sole of his boot on the stone floor. Some of the company looked thoughtfully over their pipes at Berni, considering that wise men left Christian alone in certain moods.

Christian glanced at Berni for a second.

“That’s about it,” he said, with a sour sort of grin, and gulped down a glassful of wine. He would not have endured much more of Berni’s nonsense; but fortunately, personalities were here interrupted by the entrance of Taverna, young Marti Meisser, and Hermann, the cobbler. The three men had evidently been discussing, and were still discussing, the approaching referendum; and as Lorenz Taverna was a man of well-to-do, important presence and loud voice, such an arrival was not unlikely to turn the thought and talk of the company in a new direction. Indeed, he was so fond of hearing his own voice, airing his own opinion, that it was easy to guess he would either draw away all Berni’s listeners, or else that there would be rival leaders in the *Stube* that night.

Taverna greeted his neighbors, nodded a little contemptuously to Berni, and, seating himself between the two who came in with him, went on with his talk where he left it. “I don’t mind acknowledging,” he

said, with a glance round the room that signified he was addressing a larger audience than Hermann and Meisser, "the part I played with regard to the Initiative, and that at *that* time I was as keen for Insurance legislation as any man in Switzerland. But, while the Government has been two years considering the matter, the insurance companies have waked up and done their best to meet our requirements. We 've learned a lesson in those two years, and so have the insurance companies, and there 's no need — there 's no *room*, rightly — for Government interference. You all know," — he continued looking about him ; but there was some irrelevant talk going on in Berni's quarter, so Taverna stopped and waited till it ceased ; then he went on with the air of a man accustomed to be listened to on matters political, — "you all know, I say, that I agitated for better opportunities of insurance. But now that I 've got them, why should I bind myself and my children

with this law? Things have changed, and so's my vote; and when the referendum comes on, it's 'no' for me!"

There was a general hum of approval from the company, which was all that Christian needed to make him say obstinately, "For my part, I want better reasons than that before *I* vote against the Government scheme."

Taverna turned and looked at him in surprise. "I thought everybody knew my reasons by now," he said slowly; "but I don't mind giving them again, since it's all in a good cause. First and foremost, then, I say, there's no *need* of it; and secondly, I say, don't let's be so anxious to put more power into the hands of the Confederation. The Confederation's one thing, and our Canton Council's quite another. Now when I send a Sprecher to the canton council, I know what I'm doing. I know him and his family; he knows me and the likes of me,—he cares for my interests.

But what do I know about the men right away there in Berne, and what do they know of me? And what do we want them meddling in our affairs for?"

Even Berni had been listening to the important voice, but now he interrupted. "Oh, well!" he said innocently, "you may not know them, as you say; but don't tell me they don't know you, Herr Taverna,—that's too much!"

Berni glanced at Christian for approval of his waggery; but Christian's hand was against every man's to-night, and he wanted no one to fight on his side. Taverna looked at Berni in dignified doubt. As he could not make up his mind if he were mocking him or no, he answered him with caution: "Well, well,—anyway, of course, it's nothing to you, Berni," he said, "because you're not a Swiss burgher; but it's a great deal to us, and we want every vote we can get against it, for it'll be a tyranny if it's passed."

“All right,” said Berni; “I won’t interrupt you any more.—Here, Christina! bring me something to stop my fool’s mouth with.—It’s nothing to me, as you say, because I’m not a Swiss. We Tyrolese care about being happy, and you Swiss care about being free; and that’s the everlasting difference between us. Just as some girls are chaste,” he waved his hand to Christina, “and some are pretty; and that’s the everlasting difference, too.”

By this time Taverna had no doubt as to Berni’s mood. He deliberately got up and moved his chair so that his back was turned to the jolly tippler.

“I say I’ve helped put power enough into the hands of the Confederation already,—quite enough,” he continued, shaking his head at old Hermann.

“How?” asked Christian, who knew what he meant quite as well as Taverna himself.

“By giving them the Alcohol Monopoly,” replied Taverna, with an air that suggested he had done this single-handed.

“And has n’t that proved a good thing for the Swiss people?” asked Christian.

Taverna’s dignity was spoiling a little with irritation, as he replied, “I never said nor thought otherwise. But what I mean is this: some of you want to increase the Revenue still more; but *I* say, what’s the Government doing with what it gets already? Spending more on arms than it ever spent before. And if you give it more still, you ’ll find we might be no better than Frenchmen or Germans, with their armies and national defenses. No, I don’t hold with giving ’em more power in Berne; and there you ’ve got one of the best of my reasons.”

Here the orator in a natural pause raised his glass and drained it, to a chorus of approving comments and exclamations. When he set it down, he drew a deep breath, wiped his mouth, and looked round the room. “I only hope,” he said slowly, encouraged by this noisy sympathy to still greater emphasis, “that every burgher who

knows his own interests, and his duty, will give his vote against the Insurance Bill."

His eye rested on old Hermann, who shifted nervously in his seat. "Well," said the little cobbler, "I 've made up my mind at last, I think. I was n't in a hurry about it, as you know, Herr Taverna, and I don't think a man ought to be ; but I expect I shall vote the way you vote, after all. Still, there 's things that make a man doubtful, and you cannot deny that there 's something to be said *for* it."

"So say I," muttered Christian, but less from political conviction than because he had sent back the *Schnitzbrod* his wife had given him, snubbed his little boy, and drunk two *Schoppen* already that evening.

Old Hermann went on less diffidently : "Now I ask you to consider this. Here am I, sixty years of age, and obliged to keep a lot of people I 've no business to keep, just because they were n't insured, and never would have insured themselves any more

than hang themselves. Nothing but the law of the country could have driven them to it. There 's my Anna's husband, with his right arm carried off in a cart-wheel ; and my own Jakob blinded in the Sertig forest fire. I keep Anna and help Jakob ; but if the Insurance law had existed, there 'd have been a nice bit to help along with. It 's all very well for you to talk, Herr Taverna," the old fellow went on a little tremulously, "but how about me ? "

Here young Marti broke in impatiently. "Do you mean to say that for the sake of Jakob and Anna you would put a yoke on the necks of the whole Swiss people ? "

The old man looked mildly at him through his glasses. "There 's many in like plight with me and Anna and Jakob among the Swiss people," he said.

"Ay, that there is," chimed in Christian ; "and that 's clear by sun or moonshine ! "

Taverna would have turned his back

upon Christian as well as Berni, had he been able; but he could not, because they were on opposite sides of the room. After a moment's consideration he said, louder than before, "Well, I only hope you see what it all means. I hope no old fool, nor no young fool either, is going to be cheated by this talk in Parliament about 'benefiting' the people. Here are we, the freest people in Europe, binding ourselves down with a 'benefit' which, along with others, may bring the burden of a standing army upon our necks, just as if we were those poor French, German, and Italian devils."

Here he was interrupted by a violent scuffle in Berni's corner, by the stove. Christina, the homely serving-maid, had brought him his *Schoppen*, and, resenting his gallant attempt to pull her down on his knee, tipped his hat over his eyes and flounced away. Nothing abashed, he looked after her with his loose, flushed smile, kissed his hands to her broad back, and filled up

the glasses of the two men nearest him. Perceiving that the politicians had all turned to look at him, “ Well spoken, Herr Taverna ! ” he said, setting down his *Schoppen* with an emphatic thump. “ You ought to be sent to the National Assembly ! Mean-time, worse luck, I can’t vote for you, but I can curse as well as most men. Here’s a toast, then ! ” He stood up and waved his glass. “ Here’s damnation to the Insurance Bill ! And here’s damnation to the man who first thought of it ! And here’s damnation to any man who would meddle with the liberty of the Swiss people ! ”

Every one but Christian roared approval, and there was a great clinking of glasses all round ; but Christian sprang to his feet, waved his glass, and cried above the noise of the others, “ And I say good luck to the Insurance Bill ! And God bless the man who first thought of it ! ”

There was no applause for him as he tossed off his wine,— only groans and some

laughter ; and then Taverna tried to draw him into serious argument. Berni, swearing he would waste no more good wine upon a bad bill, left the politicians in peace at last, and began a game of draughts with Meisser.

CHAPTER XIII

PETERLI PROPOSES A HEALTH

IN this hubbub no one noticed the entrance of Peter. Faint and footsore, he had reached home just as darkness fell. A neighbor who came by while the tired child was vainly trying to open the door or make himself heard within told him that Christian was round at the inn ; so thither he went, although he was near crying at the disappointment. As he entered, his father's back was toward him ; he was talking very loudly ; he and his companions all seemed to be talking at the same time, and nobody appeared to be listening to anybody else.

Peter touched him on the arm. "Father," he said.

Christian turned and stared at him, and the talking ceased in the general surprise. "What, Peterli !" exclaimed Christian.

“Yes,” said Peter ; “I’ve come because mother was so sorry I did n’t come with you this afternoon. So that’s why I’ve come.”

Christian was moved in spite of himself. He felt something was pushing open the door of his heart, just as it had done when he found the loaf in his carriage. It was hard then to keep it shut ; it was harder now, but he would have another try. He was afraid the child would blurt out the whole miserable story before his comrades ; so he got up, pushing back his chair, and talking very fast and loud.

“There, women never know their own minds ! A few days ago I wanted the lad, and I might not have him ; now she does n’t want him, and so I must have him, whether I will or no. Come, boy,” he added more gently, as he noticed Peterli’s pale little face ; “you’re just tired out. Here, Tina, bring some bread and cheese as quick as you can.”

This was a welcome of his embassage !

As his father spoke these ungracious words about his mother, Peter felt as if his heart would break for love of her ; he had certainly never loved her so much before.

“ Mother *does* want me,” he said with stout courage, if tremulous voice. “ There’s always a lot to do ; but she thought I ought to come and help you.”

“ Well, sit down and eat, and don’t talk any more,” said Christian, “ there’s a good lad.”

Peter had been hungry enough half an hour before, but now his heart got up into his throat just as it had done in Sertig, and he could hardly swallow the bread when he bit it.

“ But I don’t want to eat,” he said sulkily, his chest heaving. He pushed his plate away.

“ Drink, then, little man,” said Christian more gently. Peter was too faint to refuse the wine ; he took a few sips, and then emptied his glass. But the wine only

strengthened his heart against the father who would not thank him for coming all that long way in the dark, and who had only harsh words about the dear mother who sent him. He turned and looked at him with defiant eyes.

“Mother will have too much to do now,” he said, “what with the beasts, and Deteli, and Hami, and Barbara Luzi’s baby. Mother takes care of Barbara’s baby now, because Barbara is ill.”

Nobody heard the last but Christian, because, when once their surprise at the child’s entrance was over, the men went back to their talk and their games. Christian was not quite sure that he had heard aright.

“What did you say, Peterli?” he asked, and would have drawn the boy close to him on the long bench; but Peterli pulled away from him, and repeated his words in a sort of rude shout.

“Well, go on with your supper,” said Christian; and he left him at that end of

the table nearest Berni and his companions, while he seated himself among the politicians at the other.

The discussion among the graver ones, and the gossip in Berni's group, went on merrily ; then Berni was called upon for a song, and even the politicians gladly left off talking to listen to that ; and when he sang a second, with a rollicking chorus, they all, except Christian, joined in heartily.

And now Berni was having it all his own way, and was in fine feather. Having brought his company into harmony, he followed up the music with more toasts, Tyrolese fashion, — toasted Taverna, and the Swiss republic, and the prettiest girl in all Tyrol. Peter was bewildered and charmed by all this ; he could look at no one but Berni, and sat watching him steadfastly with his grave, round eyes ; also, he had never drunk so much wine in his life before.

A silent onlooker is always a possible critic at a jovial gathering, even though

he be but a child. Berni, conscious of the watching boy, looked him full in the eyes at last, making his own as round as Peter's. "Stare away, youngster, if you will!" he said; "only it's your turn now! Drink to her! Come!"

The boy said nothing till Berni repeated his demand; then, "I don't know what you mean," he said shyly.

"What, round-eye,—you a grown man that comes out for supper so late, and not know that? Drink to your girl,—that's what I mean!"

"I have n't got one; and besides I don't know how to do it," said Peterli, wretchedly shy. He began to edge towards Christian for shelter from the teasing, but remembering how angry he was with his father, he stopped, and felt suddenly all alone in his world. He hung his head and kicked the bar of the settle softly.

The good-natured Tyrolese was far too tipsy to see how unwelcome and ill-timed

his joking was. "I 'll show you how to do it, Peterli," he said, and stood up, holding his glass high and laying his hand on his heart. "Good health and good fortune to the lovely, gracious, virtuous, and gifted Swiss maiden, Christina !" He gave a fantastic flourish, drank off his glass, and sat down grinning. "There," he said, wiping his mustaches, "drink like that to the one you love best, my manikin !"

"Don't be stupid, Berni," said Christian, leaning forward and looking down the table at the noisy group. "Let the boy eat his supper in peace, can't you ?"

Peter looked up sharply and glared at his father. "I can't eat it," he said.

"Oh, yes, you *will* !" said Christian, his face flushing angrily, "or — "

"Look here, manikin," interrupted Berni tipsily, "I 'll see you 're let off the eating if you give us the toast. Come, now !"

Peter was flushed and excited. At the sound of his father's voice all the shyness

was suddenly drowned in the wrath and pain of his heart and the strength of the wine in his head. He jumped to his feet, looked straight in front of him with shining eyes, gave an absurd little flourish of his glass, and, in his shrill and childish voice cried, “Mütterli!”¹ Then he set his wine down untasted, and burst into tears, covering his face with his hands.

Christian rose hastily, pushing back his chair with a loud scraping noise on the stone floor.

“The child is dead beat,” he said. “He has walked too far without food. Come away, Peterli.” The child followed him, sobbing, and at the door his father lifted and carried him in his arms just as his mother carried little Hami, saying nothing at all, but holding him very close. Peter forgot how big a boy he was, and loved to be held like this to-night. His anger and pain were running away in his tears.

¹ Little mother.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTIAN'S DEVIL IS DRIVEN OUT AT LAST

WHEN they reached home, Christian set him down. "Wait, Peterli," he said gently, "until I light the lamp." When it was lighted, he said again, "Wait a moment, Peterli; I'll be back directly."

When he returned, Peter knew he had been to the bakery across the street, for from his bulging pocket he drew forth a beautiful twisted sugar-bread and gave it to the child, saying, "There,—you've eaten nothing as yet; try this."

Peter's tears were all dried by now; and weary as he was, he was delighted and surprised beyond measure. "Here's fine eating for work-days!" he said, as he crunched into the sugary thing at once. He was extraordinarily happy; and although they sat at opposite sides of the table, he felt

as if his father's arms were round him all the time. The cake was delicious, but very substantial ; and he was already wondering if he could finish it, when Christian began fumbling for something else in his pocket. "See here, too !" he said eagerly, as he pushed it across the table. It was a little gingerbread man with large plum eyes, — a really wonderful cake ; for the little man had a stick and hat which you could see quite plainly, and even his boots were clearly divided from the bottom of his trousers. It was such a cake as one has only on birthdays or at Christmas. But alas ! Peter was not hungry any longer. He bit into the cake, beaming across at his father the while, and then he laid it down with a sigh.

" Eat some more, if you can," said Christian anxiously. " See if this one tastes better than the other, then," and he actually produced a little woman to pair with the manikin.

“But I can’t,” said Peter, sorry for them both, and wondering at his own loss of appetite and his father’s lavish giving.

“Well, you should have twice as much if you *could*, anyway,” said his father ; “and even then, there would be still some for Deteli and Hami.” He emptied his pockets, and began to spread all the cakes out on the table,—a dog, a man, a woman, then a little cart, and then Davos church with its tall tower for the *Lärmglocke*, and, last of all, something that looked like a hat, but was meant to be a cradle. Peter watched him in enraptured silence as he arranged them on the clean white table.

Suddenly Christian looked up at him. “Look here, Peterli,” he began ; then he drew a deep breath. Peter noticed that his voice shook, and then that his hands, which were busy with the little cake people, were shaking too.

“Well, it’s just this,” he began again, and drew another deep breath. “Wait a

bit," he said abruptly ; and gathering the cake people together, he got up and carefully put them away in the cupboard. He was such a long time about this that when he sat down again Peter thought he must have forgotten what he wanted to say. He just sat still, looking at the table, and stroking it with his hand. He opened his mouth as if he would speak, but only cleared his throat ; then suddenly raising his fist, he brought it down on the table so mightily that the lamp jingled, and Peter jumped as though a great oath had been sworn ; and Christian flung out his arms on the table and buried his face between them.

Peter was so startled and frightened he knew not what to do. He watched his father for a few seconds without moving ; but when he heard his broken breath, and saw his shoulders shake, he got off his chair, crept across the room, undressed, and got into bed. He knew now that he loved

his father just as dearly as he loved his mother, and it made his heart feel like breaking to love him so much as this. He longed to do something good to his father, but he could not bear to speak or to touch him ; he felt just as if he were in church. Thus the poor child lay for a little, pretending to be asleep, until sheer weariness put him to sleep uncomforted at last.

In the night he awoke. It was quite dark, but he knew his father was standing by his bed. "Is that you, father ?"

"Yes, Peterli. I did not mean to wake you, though." He touched the child's head in the darkness, and all Peter's shyness died away with the touch. He was not in church ; he was heart to heart with his father.

"Why can't you sleep, father ?"

Christian's voice was very humble and husky as he said, "Because I don't deserve sleep, or any other good thing, I think."

Peter could not bear to hear him say that. It is dreadful for a child to conceive of wrong-doing in an elder; it is heart-breaking for a child to hear the confession of such wrong-doing. “Oh, Aetti!” he whimpered, clinging passionately to his father. “Oh, Aetti, Aetti, Aetti!”¹

Christian sat down on the bed, and drew the child close to him. “Listen, Peterli. I have been a pig—a fool—ever since you went away!—a brute to your mother and to all of you! But I am so sorry, Peterli!”

“No, no, Aetti!” wept Peter. “I love you so, and so does mother and Deteh, and Hami too, only he can’t talk!”—and he hugged as much of the big man as his two little arms could compass.

And because there were many tears shed in the darkness, it does not follow that this big man and this little boy were not very happy together. Indeed they were.

¹ Aetti=Little father.

At last Christian told Peter that he was to go back to Sertig with Klasje to-morrow, and he was to carry wonderful cakes to the little ones, and a message to the little mother.

“Tell her,” he said, “that after I have taken the English people to Oberammergau, I am coming out to Sertig for a bit; and ask her to make me a *Schnitzbrod*; and give her Aetti’s love. Tell her all that, Peterli.”

“Yes, Aetti! yes! yes! Oh, yes!” said Peter, and sighed for happiness and weariness; and after that he fell asleep in his father’s arms.

CHAPTER XV

SACRAMENTAL

THREE days later, Christian locked the door of his home in Davos, put the key in his pocket, and set out to join his family in Sertig. The weather was cloudless, and he was happier than he had been for many a day. In his cart he carried his clothes and a packet of wonderful cakes for the little ones. For his wife he had something better than these, but that he bore in his heart.

Ever since Peterli had come and gone, Christian had been devising ways of pleasing Ursula, and was even considering whether or no he should take the *Abend-mahl*¹ with her at Christmas. He had done this only once since the Easter of his mother's death, and that was when they

¹ Literally, "Evening Meal" = Lord's Supper.

lost little Margot. At such times Christian, like most of us, was apt to feel sad and good and inclined to go to church, and to be grateful, too, for whatever of comfort the church could offer him ; but as he grew happier again, he persuaded himself he had no right to mistake the chastened mood of bereavement for the faith of the good Christian ; and so he went back to the old lounging Sundays, nor ever came to his place at the sacred table spread four times in the year for faithful guests. He might have gone oftener to church with her, had Ursula then been more of one mind with the pastor. When the pastor asked him why he stayed away, he replied quite honestly, “ Because I have n’t got any religion in me. I can’t find any love of God in my heart ; and so I don’t think it decent to go to his house and give Him words of praise and love.”

Pfarrer Iselin had come as a young man to this mountain pastorate for the sake of

his health, and healed, remained for the love of his people. Although he was learned enough for his native city to offer him a wealthy congregation and a professor's chair as the price of his return, it was love rather than theology that made him so wise a shepherd of souls.

“You are making a great mistake, Christian,” he said ; “for you do indeed love God. You love Him in the sun that lights you, the fire that warms you, the water that washes you, the earth that feeds your beasts and grows your food ; and you love Him, too, in liking clean and sober living, in loving your wife and children, in enjoying your happiness. Why, man, all sane people love God ; but they don't all *know* when they 're loving Him. If,” he added mildly, and veiling his eager heart with admirable slyness, “you came oftener to church, we could help you to know Him as well as love Him.”

Whether they go to church or no, the

people of Graubünden have great faith in and reverence for their pastors. "Well, I never thought of it in that way before," said Christian thoughtfully; "but I think I see what you mean, Herr Pfarrer,"— and he went home full of surprise and earnest pleasure, and rid of half his reasons for staying away from church. It was then that Ursula disheartened him sadly; for, when he repeated the Pfarrer's words to her, she appeared both puzzled and disappointed. "Do you mean to tell me he never once spoke of the Bible, or the creed, or the catechism?" she asked. "Oh dear!" she said to herself, "I do so want Christe to lay hold of religion in the Bible and prayer book, and to show that he's got it by going to church on Sundays! *That's* a religion that any one can understand, and know that it *is* religion. But as to loving sunshine and clean water and other good things, why, everybody does that, and no credit to them

that I can see." Ursula had all a mother's love and prophetic patience with a baby's first feeble steps and stammering words, all her joyful certainty of the strong running, the rational speech that should come in due season. She did not understand that the Pfarrer had just such patience with the baby souls among his people, and just such hope as well ; and she shook her head, fearing the good man had missed his opportunity with her husband. As for Christian, he thought the Pfarrer was very kind, and his wife very hard to please ; and there the matter ended for the time.

Now, by an odd chance, as Christian was jogging along the Sertig road that sweet June afternoon, trying to remember if the Pfarrer's words would justify him in going to church to please his wife rather than his Maker, he came upon the Pfarrer himself, hot with quick walking and whitened with the dust of the road. A few days earlier, he would rather have met a lion

than this peaceable person, but to-day he was glad to see him as ever in the old times before he quarreled with Ursula and behaved himself so ill. Still, when it came to meeting his eyes, he found himself shy for all his pleasure, and his manner was a little stiff when he said, "Good-day, Herr Pfarrer; can I give you a lift?"

"Thanks," said the Pfarrer, climbing up beside him; "I am only going as far as Toni Michel's; his mother is dying."

Christian, whose soul and body were full of the hope of joy, looked round at the sunny hills, and thought to himself how hard it would be to die just then. "And such a grand day, too! Poor old Frau Michel!" he said.

"A grand day, for life or death," said the Pfarrer cheerfully.

They drove on in silence for a little, and then Christian, not without difficulty, opened his heart and asked the pastor's counsel. "I don't know if I have any

right to trouble you with questions, when I so seldom come to church, Herr Pfarrer," he began.

"As good a right as any man, friend."

"I have n't been to church this long while."

No one had better reason to know this than the Pfarrer, but he only said, "Is that so, Christian?"

"Yes, it is. But I was thinking of going there one time soon. I am just now going to tell my wife about it." He paused, and added slowly, "And I thought of telling her too that I would take the *Abendmahl* with her, come Christmas."

The Pfarrer showed neither his surprise nor pleasure ; he nodded gently, and Christian, with a shadow of defiance in look and tone, went on, "If you should have happened to notice anything unusual in my goings on of late, you need n't think much of it, nor trouble yourself about it any more."

“But I can’t help noticing how my people behave, and I can’t help troubling myself about their troubles.”

“I mean, it’s likely enough you’ve just been thinking that I’m not fit to come to the *Abendmahl*. Perhaps I’m not; but there’s a long time between now and Christmas; and besides, things are n’t as black against me as they look. I took up with those ways on purpose for a bit, as a short cut to peace and quiet living with my wife; and if I made a fine muddle of it, that was my affair, and I suffered most for it”—

“Not your wife?”

“Well, well,—anyway it’s turned out all right, after all.”

“Thanks to the mercy of God and not to your clumsy wit, Christian, my man.” The pastor was gently pitiless. Christian turned and looked into his eyes, and, as if the sun came out of a cloud, a slow sweet smile filled all his rugged face. To

tell the truth, this strayed sheep felt far happier under the thrusts and thwackings of the pastoral crook than any sort of coaxing back to the fold would have made him ; indeed, it is doubtful if such would have ever brought him in.

“ Well, you may put it that way if you like, Herr Pfarrer,” he said. “ Anyhow, I swear the drink’s got no more hold on me than it has on you. And I wish, if you hear folks talking, you’d say you know that for truth. It would mean a great deal from you.”

“ But *do* I know it for certain, Christian ? ” asked the Pfarrer. “ Do *you* know it for certain ? ”

Christian looked away from him up to the hills ; he raised his hat and wiped his brow with his great handkerchief. “ Before God, I know it,” he said humbly ; “ and if you will have the patience, I will tell you the whole story, and then you will know it too.” He told the story,

withholding Barbara's name, and saying only that his wife had made a strange mistake which was the root of all their wretched quarrel ; and after that he spared himself so little in his narration that, had he sent his family away to America without bidding them good-by, and rejected a whole baker's dozen of loaves, he could not have harked back oftener to these shameful incidents ; nor, had he disgraced himself with public drunkenness, could he have spoken with heartier disgust of his wasted evenings at the inn. At the end of his story he wiped his face again, which had grown far hotter than the June day made it.

The pastor did not speak for several seconds ; then he said to himself musingly, "Bread and wine ! Bread and wine !" Rousing himself, he clapped his companion on the shoulder, and said, " You 're right, Christian ; the drink *has* got no hold on you. I can't tell you how glad I shall be

to share the *Abendmahl* with you and your good wife!"

"But for all that, Herr Pfarrer," said Christian doubtfully, "and although I mean to take it, I don't pretend to understand the Holy Communion, nor what it all means, nor why we all take it."

They were at Michel's cottage, and the Pfarrer had sprung to the ground. He stood still for a moment feeling for words that should guide the living ere he went in to comfort the dying. "If you do it for love of your wife, it will teach you more about it than I can at the present moment. And yet," he added hastily, the theologian asserting himself in the mere lover of men, "I shall be so glad to explain to you as well as I can the meaning of this, and of anything else that has to do with the Christian life, if you will let me some time, Christian."

"Thank you, Herr Pfarrer," said Christian heartily. "But I'm terribly stupid

about some things. Thank you all the same. Good-by." And he drove away.

The afternoon was wearing on towards evening. For a little while yet the high sides of the valley were clothed with light, while all below them lay in shadow. Half an hour later the shadow had pushed the light up higher than the highest hill, and only the sky was bright above their cool, dark slopes. The day that had been so brilliant and hot and humming began to grow grave and to make ready for night, with slow withdrawal of definite form, with closing of eyes and folding of hands, and hushing of the hearts that had throbbed and sung from matins through noon to sundown. In the lovely gloom Christian could see the flowers in the high-standing hay more clearly than when the sun shone full on them, he was more aware of the scent and of the water that tinkled and gossiped all about him. The quiet sounds and quieter light laid his soul asleep in

the present, and while his hands mechanically guided his horses, he was living in the past and picturing the future. He thought much of Ursula the maid, the bride, the happy mother, and of Ursula the faithful wife through all these years of shared joy and loss and hardship. He thought of their quarrel, of its foolish beginning and all his consequent wrong-doing, and then of how he was going to make her happy. "As soon as ever I may I'll say, 'Uschi, I will take the *Abendmahl* with you come Christmas,'" he thought. He remembered how he felt during the *Abendmahl* as distinctly as if he were that very moment in church ; remembered how quiet the people sat, and how solemn the pastor's voice sounded, and how serious he felt as the bread and wine came round and the pastor spoke those words, "This is my Body, and this my Blood." It was certainly not easy to understand ; but for all that, he always felt better for being there and

taking the bread and wine in the quiet place with his neighbors. Bread and wine ! Those were the very words the pastor had used an hour ago ; but not — as Christian remembered with a shock — not of the *Abendmahl*, but of the peace-offering he had rejected and the wine he had drunk in wickedness. He feared it was very wrong to confuse anything so sacred with anything so profane even for half a moment in his thought, and he muttered a kind of apology for the mistake. For all that, he could not put it out of his head. “Now that’s the worst of my trying to understand religious matters,” he thought, — “I get them into a regular tangle.” And indeed, so obstinately entangled did these ideas remain, that at last he began to suspect some rightful connection between them, and ventured to search it out. On the one hand, he considered, there were bread and wine, the commonest things in the world ; on the

other, there were bread and wine, and they were the sacredest things in the world. Now why — since he was a Protestant, and did not believe with the folk of the Catholic cantons that these things were the body and blood of God himself — why were bread and wine sacred inside and not outside the walls of a church ? Well, he supposed, in church they were to remind people of Jesus Christ, his life and death, and so they fed their souls ; whereas outside, they were just food and drink for their bodies, — just bread and wine, and that was all. — But *was* that all ? or were they something more ? Were they the same things inside and outside churches, and all the world over, if only folk used them aright ?

With that the eyes of his soul came suddenly open. He drew a great breath and uncovered his head. He was filled with joy and fear, grew hot, and trembled in all his strong body as a simple man

may when he suddenly blunders into one of God's truths. "Why, that's what it means!" he said slowly at last. "I can see it quite plain! And just as I hurt Uschi with bread and wine, so I can comfort her with bread and wine!" And he was so lost in wonder that he forgot to put on his hat again until he came within sight of the Dörfli church.

Only for one moment, when the first exaltation was over, did he wonder if it could be irreligious, displeasing to God, to connect the sacred service with such homely matters as a *Schnitzbrod* and a *Schoppen* of wine. The doubt soon passed, and he felt quite as sure that the thought was sent to him — that he had not made it — as that he had not made himself. He felt quite sure God had meant to teach him something that day, and that he had learned it once and forever.

Leaving his horses and cart at the inn, he turned to walk to his dwelling, and

met Domenika on the way. She peered at him through the twilight. "You, Christian Valär?" she said. "Some of us wondered if you had forgotten us!"

"Where is Uschi?" he asked, beaming, and shaking her hand vigorously.

"Uschi is within doors," she began, adding quickly, "Come you with me." She led him round behind his house to where the empty hay-cart stood. "Get up and peep in at the window," she whispered. He got up, and was just stretching to look in when the old woman pulled his coat.

"Hei! Christe!" she said. "It's Barbara's baby she is holding!" And away she went, with cheerful muttering and nodding.

When at last he saw the woman inside the little wooden house, his heart thumped so hard and loud he thought she must surely hear it. She had lighted a candle, and sat singing softly and rocking a cradle in which he thought he knew the dark

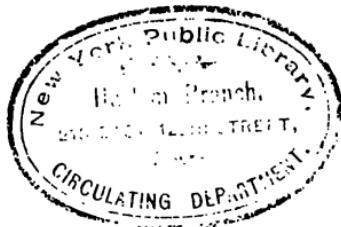
head of little Hami, while another child lay at her breast. She looked down at the sickly creature with all motherhood in her eyes. Her bright neckerchief was open ; her face and throat were sunburnt and ruddy, but her breast was white as the milk it gave. When Meiteli slept at last, she rose, fastened her dress, and laid the little one gently on her bed ; then, still humming her little song, she folded up the children's clothes, and passed to and fro smoothing the disorder of the day's work and living. No man ever found a woman more beautiful than Christian then found Ursula. Her face was gentle as good motherhood could make it, her presence full of the pleasant quiet of one who is often with sleeping children ; her rough hands were skilled through the dependence of these little ones and gentle with homely comfortings, her voice soft and low with the singing of lullabies.

At last she moved as if to go out, and

he got down from the cart and went quietly round the house and up the steps to meet her. She had already opened the door a little before he got there, so he could see her as she went back for one more look at Hami. He wanted to go in and tell her how sorry he was, and ask her to forgive him, and tell her all about the *Abendmahl* at Christmas and his wonderful thought about the bread and wine ; but not a thing could he say or do but just hold on by the door lintels and call her huskily, “ Uschi ! ” She turned sharply and saw him. “ Christe ! Christe ! ” she exclaimed ; then with a lovely movement she flung open door and arms. , “ Come in, come in, thou ever dearest man in all the world ! ” she cried ; and by the flooding crimson in her face, the light in her eyes, the tears and laughter in her shaken voice, he knew her heart stood wide as her door for him. He put his arms about

her, carried her into their little home, and closed the door.

By this time the twilight sky had deepened and darkened all about the stars so that the eye could see how many and large and bright they were ; and night, like an unspoken benediction, came down upon Sertig Dörfl.



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